

CHAPTER ONE

General Introduction

Global Problem:

Degradation of the environment has assumed a cause of global concern and in the threshold of the twenty first century man has learnt to realize the ill consequences of his conscious and unconscious activities for the fulfillment of his never-ending desires. The one time cordial man-environment relationship has been marred due to increased human greed, prominence of materialism, individualism and egoism, ruthless use and misuse of nature, irresponsible attitude of technologically innovative and economic man towards the same. We may say that the environmental picture of the present century is an unbalanced one where the life of every species of the biosphere, even the minutest one is endangered. The rapid pace of scientific and technological development has undoubtedly made human life much comfortable and easier, but their negative implications have driven us into a paradoxical situation of global environmental crisis. In fact with the onset of the concept of 'conquest of nature' which encompassed the technological oriented man, the balance of ecosystem and therefore the environment was shaken which ultimately led to environmental degradation or disaster which is affecting the survival of every organism including man.

In order to comprehend the meaning of the term global environment crisis, it is very necessary to clarify the term environment and environmental or ecological balance and the role of human being in creating the above mentioned crisis.

In general the term environment is equated with nature or surroundings wherein physical components of the planet earth viz. land, air, water and soil support and affect life in the biosphere. Environment is, in fact, a totality of physical, biological and cultural

elements which are constantly and systematically interacting with each other. The physical elements including space, landforms, water bodies, climate, soil, mineral, rock, etc determine the complex character of human habitat, whereas the biosphere is composed of plants, animals, micro-organisms, birds and human beings. The cultural elements (economic, social and political) are completely man-made features which make the cultural environment.

A delicate state of ecological balance exists in nature amongst the living species including man and the non-living environment which are mutually interdependent and constantly interacting with each other. Such a state of balance or stability is subject to relativities of space and time which imply that the state of balance is not equally stable or persistable at all times. In fact, ecological balance is an internal aspect of nature and its maintenance depends on the lifestyle followed by the different species, especially man, residing within it. One needs to point out that such a state of balance is often disturbed by physical or biological processes which nature is capable of regulating by its negative feed back mechanism known as homeostatic mechanism. When unwanted human intervention with nature with the intention to satisfy his unlimited desires greatly disturbs the ecological balance, the homeostatic mechanism fails to function which results in environmental degradation of the greatest magnitude. In the blind race for the fulfillment of his materialistic desire man has gradually cultivated an intense, individualistic outlook and attitude which has made him forget the famous dictum; 'live and let others to live'. He even fails to remember the Gandhian axiom that there is enough in the world to satisfy his needs but not his greed. His relentless march towards scientific and technological development has marred his caring attitude towards nature.

The present century is marked by ecological, scientific and technological development on one hand, whereas it is plagued by serious environment problems on the other. The basic reason behind this environmental crisis is the rapid increase in world population

which has led to rapacious exploitation of the earth natural resources and speedy rate of urbanization and industrialization. Estimating the rapid rate of environmental degradation due to interference of man with nature, R.F. Dassman inclines to say that “.....the human race is like an ape with a hand grenade. Nobody can say when he will pull the pin of the grenade and the whole world will be destroyed.”¹ In the following few paragraphs we propose to focus on some of the causes and harmful consequences leading to environment degradation.

Population Growth and Related Environmental Crisis:

Industrial expansion, modernization of agriculture, urban growth, expansion of transportation network etc consequent upon alarming rate of population growth through decades is the major reason behind environmental degradation. As long as the number of human beings interacting with nature remains within specific limits the ecology is balanced and everything works well. But when the number increases by geometric proportion and the man-land ratio becomes adverse, as in the developing countries severe ecological and environmental problems crop up. The global environmental crisis confronted today is partly rooted in rapid population growth of the south and partly in the consumerist culture of the north.

High rate of population growth in the developing countries since 1930 and its resultant pressure on the earth's finite resources has led to over exploitation of the exhaustible resources. Moreover, acceptance of the western mode of advancement with major insistence on mass production and consumption has further accelerated the above-mentioned crisis. As human population increases, its need for food and energy increases as well as the amount of waste it produces. Feeding the ever expanding population puts economic pressure on the earth's ability to regulate its own system. The marginal lands are

¹ Dassman, R.F. *Environmental Conservation*, Wiley, New York, 1976. p.20.

utilized to hasten agricultural production through the application of chemical fertilizers which pollutes air, water and land.

A gloomy picture of intense poverty and congestion is visualized in the urban centers where people from different areas flock in search of employment. The urban centers with limited space are unable to hold the teeming millions which force them to settle in slums and shanty towns of cities characterized by sub-standard living condition. The towns and cities are highly polluted with industrial and domestic waste. All these lead to human drudgery, deprivation and indignity.

In the rural areas increase in human population has led to deforestation for the purpose of habitation and agriculture which has resulted in ecological imbalance, deforestation, soil erosion, increase of wasteland and devastating floods.

Deforestation and its Impact on Environment:

The utility of forest resource cannot be underestimated. It provides a natural habit for millions of animals and micro-organisms, builds up soil rich in organic matter, binds soil through the network of roots, increases infiltration of water, reduces flood risk, increases precipitation, acts as the natural sink of carbon di-oxide, provides firewood for millions and timber for industries.

This forest resource, which is so useful for the biotic community is mercilessly exploited for fulfillment of the ever increasing desire of 'modern', 'economic' and 'technological' man due to which the natural balance of the ecosystem is disturbed, inviting severe environmental problems.

Vast tracts of virgin forest areas have been cleared for agricultural purpose and human habitation due to enormous pressure of population on land. Mass deforestation takes place due to transformation of forest areas into pastures, overgrazing by animals, forest fires, lumbering for industrial and household purpose and due to several other anthropogenic activities.

The adverse impact of deforestation is highly alarming and a matter of serious global concern. Rampant felling of trees accelerates the rate of soil erosion, increases the load of the river due to heavy siltation thereby increasing the frequency and dimension of floods and reduces soil fertility which hampers agricultural production.

In fact the most disastrous effect of deforestation is its impact on climate. The amount of precipitation lowers due to reduction in the rate of transpiration by trees and increase in the percentage of greenhouse gas, chiefly carbon-di-oxide which induce global warming. Due to destruction of forest the carbon stored in the plants and wood decays, giving off carbon-di-oxide which absorbs more terrestrial radiation accelerating the rate of global warming.

Agricultural Practice and Associated Degradation of the Environment:

Environmentalists are of the opinion that technological developments in agriculture are largely responsible for large scale deterioration of the environmental quality. Mass clearing of virgin forest areas for agriculture, expansion of irrigation facilities, immense use of chemical fertilizers, insecticides and pesticides and increased use of high yielding variety of seeds to boost agricultural production for satisfying the hunger of the teeming millions has ended in severe environmental crisis.

Modern man is bewildered as he has to fulfill the requirements of the ever increasing hungry millions by acceleration of agricultural production through the adoption of scientific techniques on one hand, while on the other hand he ought to be conscious about the irreparable environmental damages caused by such techniques.

Massive deforestation for increasing agricultural land in order to augment food supply accelerates the degree of soil erosion, reduces soil fertility, and increases the load of the river- thereby amplifying the possibility, frequency and dimension of flood.

Irreparable loss of bio-diversity, biomes and extinction of several animal species is consequent upon the practice of monoculture in several parts of the world. The conversion of the steppes of U.S.S.R, Prairies of N. America, Pampas of Argentina, Veld of Africa and Downs of Australia into the granaries of the world, virgin Mediterranean woodlands into vineyards and orchards adversely affect the balance of the forest eco-system. Such practices have definitely increased productivity, efficiency and yield, but it has also increased ecological vulnerability and instability.

Intensive methods of cultivation increases agricultural productivity rendering large scale environmental degradation. The 'Green-Revolution' launched in India to boost agricultural production since 1960 can be cited as an example. The term 'Green-Revolution' signifies agricultural production brought about by modern scientific techniques like increased irrigation facilities, use of high yielding variety of seeds and application of chemical fertilizers, insecticides and pesticides. Adoption of such technique has undoubtedly doubled or trebled crop production on one hand, but on the other hand it has increased the magnitude of serious environmental problem.

Large scale application of synthetic, toxic chemical fertilizers has raised agricultural production, but huge accumulation of unused chemicals in the soil has increased its toxicity making it unfit and sterile for further cultivation. The eluviations of such accumulated chemicals to groundwater level adulterate ground water used for drinking and irrigational purpose.

Some of the toxic chemicals used as fertilizers in agricultural fields reach the food chains of human beings and animals through vegetables and food- grains and endanger life. Nitrates, for example, when consumed indirectly through food matter perform complex chemical reaction within the human body, which increases the possibility of cancer.

The transport of toxic chemicals from the agricultural fields to ponds and lakes through rain and surface run off has led to phenomenal

growth of certain plants in the water bodies, known as 'Eutrophication' and the phenomenon has proved fatal for several valuable species of plants, animals and micro-organisms.

Agricultural production has to be boosted up in order to satisfy the hunger of the multiplied millions, but the adverse consequences of scientific techniques on environment should be kept in mind before adopting such measures.

Industrialization and Environmental Crisis:

Rapid pace of industrialization since the dawn of industrial revolution has raised the material standard of living of the people at the cost of the balanced natural environment. The adverse effect of rapid industrialization has led to severe environmental pollution which has ruined man's delicate relationship with nature. Reckless plundering of forest cover, excavation of land for mining, collapse of land for drilling of oil, excessive withdrawal of groundwater for industrial purpose has its fatal effects on the environment. Production of industrial wastes, poisonous gases released from human volcanoes (industrial chimneys) toxic chemicals, polluted water, aerosols, smoke and ashes are some of the undesirable harmful elements released due to industrialization. Such harmful elements pollute the environment imperiling human health and mind.

The hydrological environment presents a deteriorating scenario wherein the stagnant water of the lakes and ponds is contaminated due to the release and dumping of industrial effluents and wastes resulting in the death and disease of aquatic ecosystem. Some of the products of chemical industry, like different types of fertilizers, insecticides and pesticides applied to the crops and soil to hasten and enhance agricultural production reaches the food chain of human and animal population indirectly bringing about their fatal disease and death.

Intensive burning of forest, fossil fuels and rapacious exploitation of forest-cover in the name of industrialization has increased the

concentration of carbon-di-oxide content of the atmosphere. As this gas traps much of the terrestrial radiation, a rise in the magnitude of carbon-di-oxide level in the atmosphere leads to global warming which in turn causes major shift in weather patterns, with rainfall increasing in some parts, droughts in another and hurricanes becoming more stronger and frequent. Discharge of several other toxic gases, smoke and aerosols into the atmosphere from human volcanoes pollutes the air we breathe bringing about severe environmental problem.

Rapid pace of modernization and industrialization has led to greater utilization of fire extinguishers refrigerators, air conditioners and spray can dispensers emitting halos and chlorofluorocarbons (CFC). Jet plane flying through the atmosphere releases nitrogen oxide. These gases released into the atmosphere are harmful in the sense that they deplete the stratospheric ozone layer which plays a vital role in filtering and absorbing the ultra-violate rays of the sun. The creation and destruction of ozone is a natural process, but when the level of ozone depletion exceeds its creation, chiefly due to the aforesaid anthropogenic activities, global warming results due to more entrance of ultra-violet radiation which eventually disturbs the global radiation balance affecting the overall natural ecosystem. The creation of ozone holes in the industrial hubs increases the incidence of skin cancer chiefly among the white skinned masses. Releases of sulphur di-oxide from the industries bring about 'acid rain' which is very harmful for plant, animal and human life.

Noise pollution specially in the vicinity of industrials centers is a serious form of environmental disturbance. It affects the brain, auditory mechanism and some time causes hyper-tension.

Urbanization and Associated Pollution:

The level of urbanization is very much related to socio-economic development. Rapid pace of socio-economic development, mainly in the form of industrialization, has led to unplanned and mushroom growth of urban centres. A series of serious environmental and

ecological problems consequent upon the rapidity of the twin process of urbanization-industrialization have emerged. Air and water pollution, overcrowding and growth of slums and energy crisis are some of the vital environmental problems arising from urbanization.

Huge accumulations of wealth and ample job opportunities in the urban centers have attracted population from the surrounding rural areas. Consequently, the quality rural population is drained, the rural traditional industries are ruined and the agro-industrial base is crushed.

Overcrowding and congestion of population in the towns and cities due to continuing rural migration and natural growth process has created a situation where the number of people penetrating the labour market exceeds the available job opportunities. Shortage of housing, mushroom growth of slums and bustees with substandard and unsanitary living condition, large scale unemployment and poverty are the adverse consequences of overcrowding of population in the urban centers.

The twin processes of industrialization-urbanization has led to the havoc increase in the number of vehicles (emitting carbon-monoxide, sulphur dioxide and hydro-carbons), buildings, roads and streets, urban waste, sewage, aerosols, smoke and dust. Sewage water, if not treated scientifically, flow through the city and drain into the rivers, bringing about contamination of fresh water used for drinking and other domestic purpose.

Huge amount of poisonous aerosols emitted from the chimneys of 'human volcanoes' results in the occurrence of pollution domes' over the industrial cities. The air quality thus deteriorates, bringing about serious health hazards. The deadly 'urban smog' formed due to the mixing of smoke and sulphur-di-oxide spreads over the industrial city centers imperiling human life.

Reduction in the rate of infiltration of water consequent upon increased construction of 'pucca' structures lead to increased run-off which increases the frequency and dimension of flood. Increased

withdrawal of ground water for domestic and industrial purpose in the congested urban centers leads to formation of huge cavities, which ultimately bring about collapse of ground surface. Improper disposal and unscientific treatment of urban solid and industrial waste degrades the environment to a great extent.

Human beings have come to realize that this plagued environment needs a proper treatment. He has become conscious and alert about his misdeeds and has become aware that he should take a drive at the global level to solve the above mentioned problems. It is facts that progress in science and technology cannot be renounced altogether as it is very necessary for the solution of certain acute problems like poverty, hunger and deprivation of the teeming millions of the world. What ought to be done is to strike a balance between environmental protection and scientific development. Scientists and technologists of today are trying to employ soft and eco-friendly technologies so that earth's natural resources can be used sustainably as far as possible. Environmental laws, mass education on environment, media communication and environment protection activities of various social groups, political parties and educational institutions are some of the mentionable endeavours on the part of human beings to safeguard the degraded environment. It needs to be mentioned here that all these first order or empirical solutions are not enough to revive the lost ecological balance or treat the diseased environment. The pertinent question at this juncture is what ought to be done to solve this crisis? In this perspective it is very necessary for man to change the attitude towards nature. There is a need of a philosophy of life based on symbiosis, i.e. cordiality between man and nature. Here lies the role or relevance to be played by ethics which is related to environmental studies.

Objective of the Thesis:

The prime objective of my proposed research work is to find out an amicable solution to overcome the present environmental crisis

through the application of non-anthropocentric approach of modern environmental ethics. Environmental ethics is, in fact, a branch of applied ethics which tries to protect, restore and preserve the dignity and sanctity of all the species of the biotic community- animate as well as inanimate. This branch of applied ethics is a slogan against the man or human centered traditional ethics which is anthropocentric in nature. Man centered traditional ethics actually recognizes the domination and subjugation of humans over non-human species of the biotic community. It recognizes that human beings by virtue of possessing humanity as well as rationality are supposed to be the only legitimate moral agents. Morality is judged not in terms of irrespective agents, but in terms of agents having or possessing rationality by means of which what one ought to do, what is good or bad, right or wrong can be judged. Since only human agents have this quality, so human beings alone are supposed to be the legitimate moral agents. This is the single line verdict of traditional ethics which is therefore called man centered ethics too. It is anthropocentric in nature which encourages, supports and favours materialism in which only instrumental or consequential values are regarded to be only moral values. Such an objective of traditional ethics favours the 'conquest of nature' by admitting the superiority of man over nature. This in turn encourages scientific and technological development at the cost of nature or more precisely at the cost of the non-human species of the biotic community. The result is environmental degradation as mentioned in the earlier paragraphs.

Environmental ethics is a cry against the traditional approaches which promotes anthropocentrism. The new promising branch of applied ethics, with non-anthropocentric attitude as its central theme and objective, emerged as a protest against human propensity to conquer nature or administer superiority over non-human nature that tends to extinct a harmonious life within the biotic community. Instead of instrumental values, it encourages the intrinsic value, i.e. the non-instrumental value of all entities of the non-human natural

world and thereby claims that all entities deserve due moral respect and consideration. This radical branch of ethics completely rejects the domination and subjugation of man over non-human nature and thus paves the way for the development of an attitude of respect for nature within human mind. This is where the relevance of environmental ethics actually hinges on. It is highly concerned with the moral grounds for protecting the welfare of the non-human species of the biotic community. It tries to restore the moral or ethical foundations for laws protecting endangered species and the ethical basis for preserving and restoring degraded environments. Environmental ethics, in fact, centers round the question how to create a social order that protects the nature and basic human rights at the same time or how to integrate the economy and ecology, material and ethical progress, science and spirituality. Environmental ethics has a potential to help and to create such an order. It is an internalized code of behaviour that produces an ecological sound development process. Adoption of such a code of behaviour by human beings of different cultures enables the maintenance of harmonious relationship between man and nature ensuring continuing material and cultural enrichment of the society.

The problem of environmental degradation is threatening the very existence of life on earth. Scientific solutions, enactments of various laws and endeavour of different social groups to find an amicable solution to the above mentioned global crisis is on the move, but none of the attempts is truly fruitful or successful. In fact the ethical responsibility of man towards nature or a biocentric outlook of individuals towards nature is the only way to minimize environmental or ecological problems.

Modern man is quite conscious about the fatal consequences of his notorious actions. However, by virtue of his instinctive nature of enjoying happiness, failing to apprehend the subtle margin between needs and greed, he is reluctant to sacrifice the benefits of his environmental harmful activities. This is where the relevance of

environmental ethics-an ethics which makes the distinction between the right and the wrong and thereby translates values into options for actions hinges on. It is a man, the only decision making body, who should choose the correct option not only in terms of instrumental value, but in terms of non-instrumental values as well. Degradation of the environment can be controlled to a large extent if the members of the human society at large adhere to ethical provisions which substantially ensure environmental stability. A vast social space not governed by human laws still remains void and it is the ethical and moral values, which guide people in this place. Therefore the prime concern of environmental ethics is to secure, accept and follow the ethical code of behaviour, which plays an important role in regulating cordial man-nature relationship.

One of the most important components of environmental ethics is the attitude of respect towards nature by moral agents. So long the human's attitude towards nature would not be changed; it would be difficult to control the so-called environmental crisis. Here we propose to analyse how the attitude of respect for nature by moral agents would bring about a change and improve the present deteriorating man-environmental relationship. Once the moral agents adopt an attitude of respect for the non-human natural world, they ought to follow certain ethical principles or code of conduct. It is therefore necessary to assess how a person's character expresses the attitude of respect for nature. A person by virtue of his good moral character will definitely deliberate his actions correctly or in the right direction in a situation of choice. Proper or good character traits enable one to visualize clearly the necessary duties, obligations and responsibilities one ought to take towards the earth's wild living things. True respect towards wild living things is ultimately expressed when normative rules or laws are linked with ethical conduct and character of individuals. Biocentrism is another important dimension of environmental ethics in which the dignity and moral standard of non-human natural entities can be uplifted and honoured. Human beings

who are the only moral agents are rational and by virtue of his rationality they have cultivated a high degree of reality awareness. Thus, understanding biocentrism is nothing but the realization of reality. Human beings, the possessors of rationality should realize that they are the members of the earth's community of life. Since human beings by virtue of rationality are fully aware of reality, they must be conversant of the common relationship with other non-human beings. Human beings must realize themselves as one species population amongst many and thereby corroborate kinship with them as equal members of the whole biotic community. Thus we can say that biocentric approach pleads for a universal community of life.

Environmental ethics is a normative commitment to the intrinsic value of non-human nature. The non-human natural entities deserve due moral consideration on account of their possession of intrinsic value irrespective of how such value bears on human interest. The objective of environmental ethics is based on the very division of values into intrinsic or non-intrinsic, instrumental or non-instrumental values. Anthropocentrism which deals with instrumental or non-intrinsic values interprets values in terms of practice, consequence and rules. On the contrary, non-anthropocentrism, which is associated with non-instrumental or intrinsic value completely, ignores the domination and subjugation of one species by another. It tries to annihilate value-dualism, individualism and hierarchies within the biotic community. It tries to establish the coherent association of all species of the biotic community and thereby restores the dignity of all members of the biotic community. In the modern era, when modernization has crept in, fallacious human activity is continuously degrading the environment by destroying nature. All biotic natural entities have life and therefore possess intrinsic value, a value which is attributed to any entity being good in itself, i.e. a value which is good not as a means, but as an end in itself. The destruction of nature means disrespect of intrinsic value of a biotic community. The basis of environmental ethics rests on the

fact that all forms of life including humans possess intrinsic value and thereby deserve moral consideration and due reverence. Moral consideration and reverence towards non-human natural entities by human beings, the only moral agents, is the only way through which the problem of environmental degradation can be tackled.

Virgin nature is always beautiful. The natural environment insofar unconquered and unexploited by human possesses positive aesthetic qualities or has aesthetic value. We often refer to nature as graceful, delicate, beautiful and soothing, which express our aesthetic appreciation of nature. Thus we see that nature possesses aesthetic value which is positive and negative aesthetic judgments like description of nature as bland, dull, fearful and chaotic have little or no place.

The intrinsic value of nature can be substantiated in terms of aesthetic value of nature, which deserves appreciation, honour and respect. Although aesthetic value cannot be measured in terms of instrumental use, one cannot ignore the natural dignity of non-human natural entities possessing aesthetic value. Any form of scientific upliftment of the society at large tends to degrade the aesthetic appreciation of nature by moral agents. Human beings by and large apprehend the aesthetic value of nature and their appreciation of aesthetic value in the present scenario is expressed when they decorate their drawing room with a bunch of artificial roses or marks of greenery in the form of stunted plants in pots. This attitude of humans, i.e. their aesthetic appreciation of nature has been marred due to modernization through scientific advancement. There is no question of doubt that without science, it would be difficult to cope up with many first order crisis. But at the same time scientific development actually creates a large gap between man and nature. The aesthetic appreciation of natural rose can never be substituted by an artificial rose. So the vital question that needs to be addressed here is whether the artificial bunch of roses can substitute natural roses, which actually deserve aesthetic appreciation from all moral agents.

The aesthetic appreciation of nature which has been annihilated mostly by scientific advancement and technological development should be revived once again. Moral agents should recognize the natural world as beautiful and appreciate its beauty by restoring its virginity.

Deep ecology movement has emerged as a distinguished philosophical approach to combat with the present environmental crisis. Deep ecological movement is said to be the radical interpretation of modern environmental ethics based on non-anthropocentrism. Deep ecology, in fact, takes a holistic view of nature. It views the whole biotic community as an organic total in which each and every species, animate as well as inanimate, is considered to be its integral part. It encourages us to seek our true identity by identifying ourselves with the wider circle of nature. Here the interest of human beings are conversant with those of nature and thereby becomes incumbent on us to respect and serve the common interests of all species of nature. Deep ecology takes a rational perspective which is very much directed towards non-anthropocentrism.

Deep ecologists try to think about an alternative philosophical world view that is holistic and not human centered to replace the dominant world view that is responsible for the present environmental crisis. The alternative philosophical world view to be adopted by individuals to meet the challenges can be achieved by following the spiritual ideals of Buddhism, Jainism and Hinduism.

Ecofeminism is another important addition to modern environmental ethics. Ecofeminism is the twin concept of both ecology and feminism and it has been currently emerging as a very forceful approach in environmental ethics. Ecofeminism is an environmental issue in which the domination and subjugation of women by men on many accounts can be established at par with the domination and exploitation of nature. These connections are relevant because both women and nature are categorically devalued due to their distinct and similar qualities. The theory of ecofeminism may have its echo in the

Sāṃkhya system of Indian philosophy where Prakṛiti stands for nature and is compared to women. In this context the *Sāṃkhya* philosophers have highlighted the creative aspect of Prakṛiti for the enjoyment of *Puruṣa*, which stands for male. In fact, *Prakṛiti* works keeping the satisfaction of Purusa in view who is indifferent and inactive. Here due honour is shown towards Prakṛiti who is neither oppressed nor degraded by *Puruṣa*. Hence it is seen that in ancient India there is no evidence for exploiting environment or nature by an individual.

A central position grounding ecofeminism is the belief that values, notions of reality and social practices are related, and that forms of oppression and domination, however, historically and culturally distinct are interlocked. It holds that connection between women and nature exists because women are part of nature and the oppression of nature is played out in specific ways on women's bodies, activities and conceptual framework. Thus, understanding ecofeminism equally means understanding nature. Ecofeminism not only finds out the parity of domination between women and nature, it also explores various ways and means through which such types of domination can be regarded as morally unjust. By comparing women with nature, it tries to restore the dignity of nature in moral context. In this regard we can say that ecofeminism is largely about ethics, norms and values that will support well-being of the whole biotic community. Thus, any attempt to cohere feminism with nature is to value nature. Ecofeminism seeks to understand better the scope of moral respect, the sort of entities that can and should receive moral attention and the true natural world which morality is supposed to promote. Here we propose to highlight in what sense the connection between women's oppression and environmental degradation are interlocked. One of the major aspects of my work is to substantiate the relevance of non-anthropocentric approach of environmental ethics from a spiritualistic perspective of Indian thought. The relevance of non-

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anthropocentric approach lies submerged in many Indian religious thought like Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism in particular.

If one goes through the Vedic literature, Upanishads and *Puranas*, one may perceive the role Hindu religion once played with respect to human treatment of the natural environment. In the Vedas, respect for nature was expressed through reverence for the five *Mahabhutas* or cosmic elements, i.e.- *Pr̥thivi* (earth), *Vāyu* (air), *Akasā* (space), *Apah* (water) and Agni (fire), which played a major role in sustaining the environment . In the Vedas, *Pr̥thivi* is referred to as *Devi Vasundharā* (Mother Earth) who provided nourishment and place of habitation to the entire family of human and non-human beings referred to as '*Kutumbakam*'. This is the concept of '*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*' which actually brings out the relationship which the early Hindus maintained with nature. We thus see that Hindus worshipped nature as their God and therefore never thought of harming or exploiting it.

The *Puranic* concept of life after death or the cycle of birth and rebirth or transference of soul from one body to another in which humans took rebirth in the forms of animals and birds showed reverence and equal respect for all creatures of the universe.

Similarly, Jainism and Buddhism, the religious faiths adopted in ancient India spread the doctrine of *Ahimsā* or 'non-violence' which actually visualizes their sincere concern for nature. Now the question which needs to be answered is why in spite of all such rich tradition and philosophy India is facing environmental crisis? Centuries of cultural and social dominance by Islamic and Christian tradition and the invasion of the forces of materialism, consumerism and individual greed following urbanization and industrialization has shaken the noble values which were once possessed by Indians on account of their rich cultural heritage.

In fact, a desirable achievement of non-anthropocentric approach of modern environmental ethics can be obtained by adopting and implementing sustainability, seeking environmental justice,

enlightenment of spirituality and above all universal benevolence
towards nature.

