
UNIT 2 DEEP ECOLOGY: RESPECT AND VENERATION FOR NATURE

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2.1 INTRODUCTION

The last few decades have witnessed serious concerns at all levels- **local**, -regional, national and international- regarding the environmental degradation and its cruel impact on both the human and non-human habitat. The sustainability factor of the planet earth has become a point of debate and there has been a reiteration of reviving the local cultures and customs that are eco-friendly. Numerous debates have been on the rise about the environmental values, duties and rights. These debates are crucial in the background of fast eroding natural resources and the possible debilitating impact on the ecology. As has been mentioned in the previous Unit, there existed once an indelible **harmony** between the human beings and the nature or environment. Today this relation has taken a strenuous turn, thus leading to pollutions of all kinds- air, water, soil, land etc. Further, there has been an increasing level of consciousness towards environmental protection and scaring about the planet earth. Several conventions, conferences, debates etc., are being held to discuss issues related to pollution, environmental degradation, soil erosion, deforestation and so on. Almost all the sections of society like the environmental groups, academics and policy makers are now **taking** active interest in restoring the natural habitat.

Aims and Objectives

This Unit would enable you to understand

- The importance of deep ecology and its survival
- The concept of veneration of nature
- The different religious sources and Environmental values
- The changes that need to be brought in our lifestyles.

2.2 DEEP ECOLOGY: CONCEPT AND MEANING

Before we dwell upon the aspects relating to respect and veneration for nature, it is necessary to understand as to what is deep ecology, its **importance** and impact on our

livelihoods. In this Unit, the terms ecology, environment and nature are being used synonymously so as to accommodate the important views and expressions as spelt out through various sources. The learner may keep this mind so as to avoid any confusion. Coming to the explanation of the concept of deep ecology, it may be noted that according to the Wikipedia, 'deep ecology is a contemporary ecological **philosophy** that recognizes an inherent worth of other beings, aside from their utility. The philosophy emphasizes the interdependent nature of human and non-human life as well as the importance of the ecosystem and natural processes. It provides a foundation for the environmental, ecology and green movements and has fostered a new system of environmental ethics' (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deep_ecology). It also states that unlike other branches of sciences that view ecology more as a biological science, 'deep ecology seeks a more holistic view of the world humans live in and seeks to apply to life the understanding that separate parts of the ecosystem (including humans) **function** as a whole' (Ibid).

The term 'deep ecology' was coined by the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess, who did not believe in the relative ranking of the beings, such as humans having more claims than other beings in their existence. To him, all have an equal right to life, a right that is universal in nature. No single being or species can claim specific rights to live, while depriving or denying it to others.

Similar views have been propounded by Bill Devall and George Sessions in their work on Deep *Ecology* (1985). Holding the view that everything is connected to everything else, they observe the changing trends of emerging deep ecological consciousness that goes beyond anthropocentrism.

To say in precise terms, deep ecology contends the view that the self should **identify** with all living beings as everything and every being is created by the creator of the universe, the Supreme Being. It is a process of self-realisation and re-connecting with the plant, animal and ecosystem all together. The Indian culture and civilisation has been very much in harmony with this concept if we understand the real meaning of deep ecology. Our ancestors believed in the harmonious co-existence of nature and human beings and had better realisation as to what the ill-effects of the disharmony, when it arises.

2.3 PRINCIPLES OF DEEP ECOLOGY

Devall and Sessions elucidated the principles of deep ecology in their mentioned work (p.70). They forward the views of the proponents of deep ecology who believe that the world is not freely available to the human beings to indulge in over-exploitation of resources. The eight-tier platform, as they call it, is given as under:

1. The well-being and flourishing of human and nonhuman life on earth have value in themselves (synonyms: intrinsic value, inherent value). These values are independent of the usefulness of the nonhuman world for human purposes.
2. Richness and diversity of life forms contribute to the realization of these values and are also values in themselves.
3. Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy vital human needs.
4. The flourishing of **human** life and cultures is compatible with a substantial decrease of the human **population**. The flourishing of nonhuman life requires such a decrease.

5. Present human interference with the nonhuman world is excessive, and the situation is rapidly worsening.
6. Policies must therefore be changed. These policies affect basic economic, technological, and ideological structures. The resulting state of affairs will be deeply different from the present.
7. The ideological change is mainly that of appreciating life quality (dwelling in situations of inherent value) rather than adhering to an increasingly higher standard of living. There will be a profound awareness of the difference between big and great.
8. Those who subscribe to the foregoing points have an obligation directly or indirectly to try to implement the necessary changes.

(Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deep_ecology).

2.4 ENVIRONMENTAL VALUES: RELIGIOUS SOURCES

While much has been debated and discussed on the role of governmental, non-governmental, judicial and other agencies, inadequate attention has been paid to the role and responsibility of the citizens towards environmental values and behaviour. Some of the environmental threats include excessive emission levels, heavy usage of the energy consuming gadgets, littering one's surroundings, unsustainable consumption levels, increased domestic waste including e-waste, dumping of harmful and hazardous medical waste. The materialistic consumption is now being calculated as the measuring standard of human development, leaving behind the basic issues of health care, sanitation, and hygiene, which are much more crucial to human health. Most importantly, the environmental values are being inadequately inculcated in the present times and generation.

Environmental ethics and values are closely related to our behaviour towards the conservation of our nature or natural environment. Values, as Bharucha notes, lead to a process of decision making which leads to action. For value education in relation to the environment, this process is learned through an understanding and appreciation of nature's oneness and the importance of its conservation (Bharucha, 2005, p.230). It is an intellectual code of behaviour that regulates man's relationship with nature. It cannot be imposed by law but has to be articulated, systematized, codified and brought to the doorsteps of each and every individual (RP Misra, 1995). In this regard, the individual responsibility towards the environmental protection has been rather dismal. This stems partially from the lack of social awareness and partly from the lack of environment ethics, values and education. James Speth identifies two factors that are central to the environmental ethics- 'the protection of their (people's) own sake of the living communities that evolved here with us and our trusteeship of the earth's natural wealth and beauty for generations to come' (Speth, 2004, p.192). He also contends that 'to realise such a future, societies will have to free themselves from a variety of pernicious habits of thought, including enchantment of limitless material expansion and what John Kenneth Galbraith has said 'the highly contrived consumption of an infinite variety of goods and services' (Speth, 2004, p.192).

India has had a distinct civilisation and culture that was very much in consonance with natural habitat. Nature (prakriti) was revered with utmost devotion and the civilisation was known for its cultural and spiritual heritage in protecting its environment. These factors constituted an important element in sustaining the natural wealth but have been constantly neglected by the mankind. The western concept/ perception that nature and

environment exist for the service of humanity have slowly crept into our society, promoting the values of **unsustainable** consumption and acquisitive materialism. Dwivedi rightly observes that 'culture and religions of the world can provide a solid foundation for changing people's attitudes on the preservation and conservation of the environment. World religions and cultures, particularly Oriental belief systems, do not inherently subscribe to the abuse and exploitation of Nature for material and selfish gain' Unfortunately, 'culture and no part of the world has remained immune from mankind's irreverence towards nature, an irreverence that has brought in its wake the destruction of our own habitat, our progeny and ourselves' (Dwivedi, in preface, pp.vi-vii). He also identifies that ethical values emanating from the world religions and cultures are some of the basic determinants of our behaviour towards nature.

Almost all the religions of the world have, in a direct or indirect manner, referred to the protection of environment as a fundamental duty of the mankind. For example, cultivating the earth and planting trees is considered as an act of spiritual **upliftment** in Zoroastrian faith. As Dwivedi mentions, 'one of the important duties of a Zoroastrian is to look after the seven creations of the skies, waters, earth, plants, cattle, man and fire. Purity and cleanliness are forms of caring for these creations for 'whosoever has learned the care of all these seven, acts and pleases well, his soul never comes into the possession of **Ahriman** and the demons'. Thus, caring for the creations is basic ecology for Zoroastrians, and hence nothing impure should contaminate the seven creations' (Dwivedi, p. 42). Further, they are said to have special and precise prayers that are recited so as to retain the sanctity of the creation. The words of the prayer are as follows: 'I invoke the holy world made by Mazda Ahura (the Supreme God of Zoroastrians), I invoke the earth made by Ahura, the water made by Ahura, and the holy trees. I invoke the sea, I invoke the beautiful heaven (sky), I invoke the endless and sovereign light'.

Judaism speaks of care and concern for other living beings on the earth: under its tradition, though it clearly states that the world is for human **benefit**, it does not undermine the importance of God's creation. All the human beings are required to respect and revere nature and not squander it as nature is a precious creation of God. Their Biblical laws reiterate the importance of showing concern for the rest of the creation and especially espouse showing compassion and care for non-human species. The injured animals may be taken care of, and the commands include showing mercy, humility and care for all.

Hinduism believes in the existence of the divine in all its living forms and severely condemns any violence against the natural habitat. Similarly, the cultural moorings have also a positive impact on our environmental behaviour. For example, some of the communities like Bishnois have a high regard for nature and animals and do not tolerate inflicting of harm on the living **species**. For people living in the hilly terrains, nature is an inseparable part of their life and do not subscribe to exploiting it for material gains and comforts. The philosophy and way of life, especially in the ancient India, was 'living in tandem with nature'. The sacred texts like Vedas and Upanishads laid emphasis on this aspect and were followed reverently by the sages and great philosophers. The guidelines were based on the Hindu philosophy that enshrined the principles of worshipping nature (other religions were unknown during the ancient times) including rivers, forests, earth, sky, air, water, plants and animals. The cutting of trees, air, water and land pollution were considered as **sinful** acts and the natural calamities like floods, droughts, and earthquakes were considered as violent forms of anger manifested by the gods and goddesses. While worshipping of trees and plants was regarded as bestowing of prosperity and purity of word, thought

and action, respect to animals and birds was considered as a sacred duty for these were taken as the mounts of gods and goddesses. Violence was also forbidden to animals and other creatures emphasising the principle of equality of all living creatures. Consequently, these acts have taken religious connotations but carried the undertones of utility and medicinal values apart from creating a sense of spirituality.

In Christianity, both the Old and New Testaments underline the importance of nature and God alone is considered as the sole owner of the nature. Psalm, 24:1 says, 'the earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it'. It also advocates a harmonious relationship between the humanity and the environment. All beings, including humans, are dependent on God as He is the sole creator and preserver of nature and thus makes no division between the concepts of nature and humanity as separate entities. The earth is in no way a lifeless entity and failure to venerate nature is said to bring in alienation of man from God. Neither do the human beings have a right to destroy nature, which they cannot create. The concept of divine love for all thus enriches the harmonious relation between man and other creatures.

As in other religions, Islam too acknowledges God's creation as the foundation of life on this earth. The harmony and balance need to be maintained not only between individuals but also with other creatures. Man is only a guardian of nature, which is God's creation; he is definitely not the owner. Any alteration to God's creation is unacceptable in this religion and is considered as sinful. Such acts are made accountable before God after one's death and invites punishment for any violation of harmonious relation with nature. Since man is endowed with the wisdom of distinguishing between right and wrong, he/she should desist from doing wrong deeds towards other creatures. Nature is not created simply for man's use; in this context, the concept of *tawheed* (unity of God) is significant as it is said that 'Allah (God) is Unity, and His Unity is reflected in the unity of mankind and nature. Further, His trustees have been made responsible to maintain the unity of His creation, the integrity of earth including its flora, fauna, wildlife and the natural environment. And this unity ought to be maintained by balance and harmony' (Dwivedi, p.52). Environment is considered as a gift of God to all for all ages and not just for the present. The earth is considered as an utmost important place because it is a place for worship of God and is thus a source of purity.

The core principles of Buddhism revolve around compassion and love for all beings. Human beings are part of nature and not separate from it; therefore disregarding nature is strictly forbidden. The other species have an equal right to life and survival. Since the tenets of this religion are based on non-violence, harming any of the species is considered as malicious. The nature cannot also be used indiscriminately. For example, cutting of the trees is forbidden: firstly, it is akin to cutting off one's child's arms and secondly, they are venerated as sources of peace, enlightenment and meditation. Since all life is interconnected, there is an imminent need to practise ethics to protect the nature at all costs.

Similarly, Jainism too thoroughly underlines the need for non-violence and strictly denounces harm to any creature. Since peace can be achieved only through peace, violence or injury to any being is deemed as sinful. Even digging grounds for no reason, cutting trees, plucking plants and flowers, sprinkling water etc., are also a sort of source of violence and should be avoided under all circumstances. As in Buddhism, Jainism also places special emphasis on the protection of trees as they are irrevocably linked to spirituality and compassion. Since ahimsa is the core principle of this religion, the humans should

show compassion to other living beings and discard the sense of superiority, for all have the same destination or goal to achieve, and that is peace and harmony.

Sikhism is no different when it comes to achieving peace and harmony of mankind. As in other faiths, here too God is the Supreme Being and has not bestowed any special privileges to the human beings to conquer nature. Infact human beings are only part of the holistic creation, including nature. Since God has created this universe, only He has the right to destroy it. It teaches the mankind to behold the beauty of nature, the marvelous creation of God, elements of nature like air, water and earth. Any interference with nature by human beings would wreak nothing but destruction. Therefore, the Gurus of this religion have attached much importance to all beings and elements.

Keeping in view the sacred veneration and respect attached to nature by all religions, it can be understood that the Indian civilisation did have an irrevocable bond with the nature and has been highly venerated as the creation of God. Therefore, the sacred principles were followed with much faith and sincerity for many ages. Regrettably these values are now being corroded owing to the external cultural influences. The traditional environmental ethos is being replaced by the current trends of western materialism and consumerism. The concept of what is morally right or wrong has been changing from time to time, thereby resulting in an automatic change in our behaviour patterns towards our natural environment. There is also an ensuing change in the value systems that affect the holistic perspective; a similar change is now being witnessed in our perception of the nature and environment. Nature, once valued and revered, is at the receiving end of the changing human behaviour patterns, now attuned to the materialistic culture. As discussed earlier, we are all bound by the creation of God and need to view other beings with equanimity and compassion. At the same time, we are also under obligation to fulfill certain prime duties to ensure the same and live in harmony with nature.

2.5 RESPECT TOWARDS ENVIRONMENT

Science and Technology have changed the course of our lives in an unprecedented manner. While it is perceived as the cause of the current state of environmental degradation, it is also viewed as an effective way to combat the environmental degradation through **environmental-friendly** technology. It needs to be noted that we cannot formulate solutions through technological means alone. There is a need for a change in the way 'individuals think about and interact with their environment...if respect for environment is to be achieved and an ecological crisis averted' (Dwivedi, p.28). It has to be remembered that:

1. **Development** does not connote material culture and its enjoyment;
2. **Human** beings do not have the right to harm other forms of life; and
3. **I-human** beings cannot conquer nature for individual gains

Our rights need to conform to our duties. All the religions of the world stress upon the **individual's** responsible behaviour towards the environment; therefore we have an obligation to sustain our natural resources and ensure their judicious usage. An ethical strategy for environmental conservation has been effectively spelt out in the first draft of the report on the World Conservation Strategy for the 1990s (IUCN, 1989, pp.3-4):

- (a) People should respect nature, like all creatures we are an integral part of nature as well as users and consumers of nature;

- (b) Every life form is unique and warrants respect regardless of its worth to people;
- (c) All persons should take responsibility for their impacts on nature;
- (d) People should ensure the means of survival of all other life forms; and should not knowingly cause the extinction of another species;
- (e) People should treat all creatures humanely, and protect them from cruelty and avoidable suffering.

As rational human beings, we have specific duties towards our humanity and God's creation. As Dwivedi explains, these are categorized as *manava dharma* and *global dharma* (Here the term *dharma* refers to one's sense of duty and conformity to the moral law and not religion as is usually referred to). While the concept of rights of all specifically connotes the former, the latter is extended to our compassion for all living beings on this earth. From here emanates the concept of *vasudhaiva kutumbakam*, encompassing an expanded vision of our co-existence with all living beings as part of one family. Our moral duty, therefore, obligates us to view and treat all with compassion; this, in essence, is our *manava dharma*. As Mahatma Gandhi once said, our consumption should be need-based and not greed based. His saying thoroughly conforms with the *manava dharma* dimension; he forewarned us to voluntarily reduce our wants so that there is less consumption of resources in individual terms. Our sense of duty enables us to gain mastery over our basic human characteristics of greed and exploitation and also enables us to discipline our inner thoughts. This, in turn, reinforces our values and ethics that are necessary to create an ecologically sound and sustainable order (Dwivedi, p.129). We need to strongly inculcate in ourselves and our society to follow an ethical code of conduct towards protecting our environment. Some of the features include our determination to (1) work towards protection of nature; (2) judiciously use the natural resources; (3) protect the sanctity of nature; (4) morally commit to sustainable consumption; (5) responsibly behave towards environmental management.

On a note of individual responsibility, we can promote an effective transition to sustainable society by educating ourselves and others, by fulfilling the societal obligations to use resources with care and most importantly by recognising the fact that the future generations too are entitled to the resources, which we are depleting at an alarming rate. On a concluding note, we need to remember a crucial aspect as spelt out in *The Earth Charter Preamble*.

"...we must decide to live with a sense of universal responsibility, identifying ourselves with the whole Earth community as well as our local communities. We are at once citizens of different nations and of one world in which the local and global are linked. Everyone shares responsibility for the present and future well-being of the human family and the larger living world. The spirit of human solidarity and kinship with all life is strengthened when we live with reverence for the mystery of being, gratitude for the gift of life, and humility regarding the human place in nature".

2.6 SUMMARY

In this Unit, we have learnt about the concept of deep ecology and how it is an imminent part of our life. We need to protect our nature so that we and the future generations could lead a harmonious life on this planet earth. The meaning and concept of deep ecology has been developed incessantly over the last few decades. When we reflect

upon our ancient traditions and wisdom, we can definitely conclude that the Indian way of life and day to day practices have been in conformity with nature. What we call deep ecology now and try to extend the discussions and debates at various fora have been in practice in our civilisation since ages. But the concept of deep ecology connects very much to our values and traditions and there is an imminent need to dwell deeper into the subject to know it in its entirety and meaningfulness. It is the responsibility of the present and future generations to view nature as an intricate part of our life and inculcate the spirit of veneration if we aspire for a peaceful future.

2.7 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. What is meant by deep ecology? Explain its meaning and significance.
2. What are the principles associated with deep ecology? What significance do they hold in this globalised era?
3. 'Veneration of nature is akin to achieving peace'. **Justify** the statement in your own words.
4. What are the different religious sources that enumerate the environmental values? Discuss at length.

SUGGESTED READINGS

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