



## Some Reflections on the Modern Environmental Ethics

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**Abstract-** The prime objective of this paper is to explain what environmental ethics is and demand for environmental ethics from non-anthropocentric outlook. Environmental ethics (environment + ethics = environmental ethics) is a branch of applied ethics which considers the moral relations between human beings and their natural surroundings. Environmental ethics is a cry against traditional anthropocentric ethics. Environmental ethics emerged as a protest against human mastery over non-human nature is said to bring destruction to the ethical bridge that existed between man and beautiful nature. Thus, man-centred ethics is primarily responsible for environmental degradation as it favours superiority of humans over nature which ultimately led to environmental degradation. This diseased environment needs a proper treatment. Here modern environmental ethics, instead of anthropocentrism or man-centred ethics, hinges that humans have certain responsibilities to the natural world, and it seeks to help people and their leaders become aware of them and to act responsibly when they do things that impact the natural world.

We think that modern environmental ethics with its non-anthropocentric approach is an amicable solution to overcome present day environmental crisis in that environmental ethics as a branch of applied ethics tries to save, restore and preserve the dignity of all biotic communities - animate as well as inanimate. It claims equal moral status of all living beings. Therefore, in a nutshell it can be said that environmental ethics with its non-anthropocentric approach is essential for proper curing of the plagued nature.

**Keywords-** Anthropocentrism, Degradation, Environment, Ethics, non-anthropocentrism

### I. INTRODUCTION

The prime objective of this paper is to explain environmental ethics and demand for environmental ethics from non-anthropocentric point of view. Before going to discuss environmental ethics, it is necessary to draw the attention of our readers to *environment* and *ethics*. Generally by *environment* we mean surroundings or nature. "Environment is the sum total of living and non-living components, influences and events surrounding an organism" [1]. The view that *environment* is a totality of physical, biological as well as cultural elements which are mutually interdependent and systematically interacting with each other at all times. On the other hand, *ethics* is called *moral philosophy* for it is concerned with what is morally *good* (right) and *bad* (wrong). So, one can say without exaggeration that environmental ethics is concerned with the *morality* (right and wrong) of human actions as they affect the environment or the natural world we live in. Or in other words, environmental ethics is a branch of philosophy in general and applied ethics in particular. It considers the moral relations between human beings and their natural surroundings. As a field of study, environmental ethics

assumes that humans have certain responsibilities to the natural world, and it seeks to help people and their leaders become aware of them and to act responsibly when they do things that impact the natural world. We think that environmental ethics as a branch of applied ethics tries to save, restore and preserve the dignity of all biotic communities - animate as well as inanimate. It claims equal moral status of all living beings.

### II. MODERN ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS VERSUS TRADITIONAL MAN-CENTRED ETHICS

Modern environmental ethics is a slogan against man-centered traditional ethics which is anthropocentric in nature. The question then is: what is anthropocentrism? Anthropocentrism is a view where nature is conceived as a storehouse of materials to be used and exploited by humans for their personal need and satisfaction. For example: Traditional ethics is anthropocentric because traditional ethics promotes anthropocentrism where the domination and subjugation of humans over other non-human species of the biotic community has widely been recognized. Anthropocentrism recognizes superiority of humans over

non-human species of the biotic community. The most dominant trend of anthropocentrism is reflected in Christianity, Rationalism and Scientism, Capitalism, Utilitarianism, Judaism, Men, Nazi, the West and Materialism too. In order to make this point clear, let us consider briefly what the ancient book *Genesis* describes is the single position of human species in relation to non-human communities in environment. In *Genesis*, God says to the human beings, "Be faithful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it, and have domination over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." God also said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; and you shall have them for food" [2]. Evidently, the book *Genesis* expresses a clear opinion regarding anthropocentrism and favours anthropocentrism. Anthropocentrism considers human beings as the only legitimate moral agents for humanity as well as rationality and favours materialism in which only non-intrinsic or instrumental values are considered to be the only moral values. Thus, it appears that "Anthropocentrism recognizes that every resource in nature is meant for human use which results environmental degradation" [3]. Instead of human mastery over the nature, environmental ethics envisages our moral relations with the natural environment. "This specific branch of applied ethics took its birth in protest against traditional anthropocentric or human centred ethics which recognizes superiority of humans over non-humans fostering conquest or plundering of nature ending up in ecological disaster of the greatest magnitude" [4].

### III. ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS IS THE OUTCOME OF ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS

As a promising branch of applied ethics, environmental ethics is a quite recent origin, having become a body of organized knowledge only in the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In other words, environmental ethics is the outcome of global environmental problems or crisis. Nobody can deny that the global environmental crisis is a long and familiar one. Many of the global ecological problems came about because of the rapid increase in the growth of the human population worldwide. The environmental crisis the world is facing due to interference of man with nature. It is worthy to note here that the negative aspect of nature implies that the existence of nature is for mere use and exploitation by human for his endless desires supposed by anthropocentrism which inviting severe environmental problems. R. F. Dassman says 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" [5]. What it reveals that populations continue to soar, the various problems caused by too many people naturally increase in both their number and seriousness.

Alarming population growth have polluted the air, water, and soil, is also added the depletion of these and other very important natural resources which resulted in ecological imbalance. Unless a delicate state of ecological balance is equally stable at all times, then increases the magnitude of serious environmental problem. That is to say that unwanted and unlimited human intervention with nature greatly disturbs the natural balance of the ecosystem which results in environmental crisis of the greatest magnitude. It is because modern man fails to realize Gandhian axiom that "there is enough in the world to satisfy one's need and not one's greed" [6]. The relentless march of humans towards materialism, consumerism, individualism and egoism has brought the life of each and every community at the brink of extinction.

The key reason behind this plagued environment is uncontrolled population growth and man's misdeeds with nature for his never-ending luxurious needs. What we have claimed is that environmental problems are very much associated with anthropocentrism we have already hinted above. The present day world needs to be saved from this catastrophe. However, the first order or empirical solutions such as *environmental laws*, *mass education on environment* and other *scientific environment protection activities* are not enough to revive the lost of the natural balance of the ecosystem. This is where the application and relevance of environmental ethics actually hinges on. It is a cry against human propensity to overcome nature that tends to died out a harmonious life contained by the biotic community. Environmental ethics came about as a necessary response to a growing number of much unwarranted threats to the physical condition of the present day environment. Thus, it becomes clear that environmental ethics took its birth in protest against human centred ethics which recognizes fallacious human activity is continuously degrading beautiful nature.

### IV. ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEM IS NOT A PROBLEM OF NATURE ITSELF

It is also important to point out here that environmental crisis is not a crisis or problem of the nature itself. Today's environmental picture is an unbalanced one or endangered. The environmental problem is threatening the very existence of life on earth. Thus we may say that it is a problem both in present and future generations. Perhaps, this is the reason why the first *Earth Day* launched in the United States and later around the world. A number of people claim environmental ethics with the rise of first *Earth Day* held on 22<sup>nd</sup> April, 1970. The first *Earth Day* rightly opened up the beginning of an environmental awareness. It made human community conscious of environmental responsibility should be developed and applied in our everyday lives. We have seen on the *Earth day* (and every April since),

arrangers, namely, NSS of School, Colleges and Universities around the motherland rallied and demonstrated to make people in all stages conscious of the meaning of caring for and preserving the nature. Thus, by repudiating anthropocentrism, many people intend to establish environmental ethics from non-anthropocentric attitude.

#### V. NON-ANTHROPOCENTRISM IS AN AMICABLE SOLUTION TO THE GLOBAL ECOLOGICAL CRISIS:

The Non-anthropocentric outlook of environmental ethics is a strong defense of the natural world as it questions how deeply humans affected the environment, how to create a social order that save nature from harm, how to integrate science and ethics etc. The non-anthropocentric approach of environmental ethics, in fact, made human conscious all ill consequences of his activities. It says that our responsibility to the natural environment is that all forms of life have an intrinsic right to live in the natural world. What this point of view advocates is *moral standing* to animals and plants. Since non-anthropocentrism argues that plants, like humans, are to be considered morally significant persons. It claims that humans have a direct responsibility toward maintaining the natural world for all forms of life or all biotic natural entities. Therefore, human beings ought to utilize nature either by not disturbing nature or by a change of humans attitude towards nature, i.e., from an *ego-centric* to an *eco-centric* one. How can this be done? In this respect Buddha brilliantly compares the collection of nectar by bees with man's utilization of nature. According to Buddha bees accumulate nectar from flowers and convert it into sweet honey by not disturbing the beauty and fragrance of the flowers. Similarly, human beings ought to utilize environment and accumulate wealth by protecting nature or by not disturbing environment.

#### VI. CONCLUSION

In the light of the above discussion, we may conclude that the lack of ethical base in modern quantitative science and technology or anthropocentrism is said to bring destruction to the moral and spiritual bridge that existed between human beings and environment. By contrast, environmental ethics with its non-anthropocentric approach is relevant to preserve nature. The non-anthropocentric approach of environmental ethics favours protective utilization of environment. It is a normative commitment to the intrinsic or non-instrumental value of irrational nature. Even the beginning of future progress for a better world lays in the fact that our environmental actions are *good* (right), otherwise not. Thus, we become conscious that nature must be appreciated and considered for its own sake and treated with reverence etc.

marks the beginning of a real ethics of the environment from non-anthropocentric approach. The thrust of the paper makes it clear that environmental ethics with its non-anthropocentric approach is the only way to minimize the problem of environment of the present century. Alternatively it can be said that the ethical responsibility or moral consideration, i.e., love and respect of man towards non-human species, i.e., nature or environment is the only way through which environmental degradation can be tackled.

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