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4

Environmental Ethics and Major World Religions: A Philosophical Perspective

Dr. Haripriya Sarma

*Former ICSSR Doctoral Research Fellow & Former Research Scholar,
Department of Folklore Research, Gauhati University, Assam*

Abstract

Environmental ethics is a very essential topic of today, comes under the philosophical branch of applied ethics, and is a part of environmental philosophy. Spiritual value, reliance, faith, and conviction have always co-operated a considerable part in forming, guiding as well as impacting the opinion and behavior of man. Now, in this modern age, excess involvements of human beings in nature have effect enormous harm to the harmony of the environment. If this continues then our future generation will suffer because of our present deeds. We need to understand our moral responsibilities to the next generation. We have the liabilities to make available the same natural properties to them with an opportunity equal to our own to live a wholesome and joyful living. In reflection of their future bliss, we must become aware of what we are doing now. Hence, Awareness concerning this leads the way people to look at the approach through which more harm to the environment can be prohibited. As a section of applied ethics of philosophy, environmental ethics teaches us how to keep the equilibrium of the environment as well as how to preserve our entire environment. The present paper will explore the relationship of nature with some major religions and their belief system concerning nature. The paper will also try to bring light on the significance of environmental ethics and how it works for the well-being of mankind and nature as well as future generation.

Key Words: *Environmental Ethics, Philosophy, Religion, Hinduism, Christianity, Buddhism, and Islam.*

Introduction

From a very early time people had queries concerning the connections between human beings and the world of nature. Over time people's amplified curiosity and awareness regarding environmental issues brought attention and started to happen social movements in the 1960s. Consequently in early 1970s due

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to the huge efforts of some of the great philosophers like- Richard Routley, Jhon Passmore, Arne Naess, and Holmes Rolston's and under their works the environmental ethics has decided to be establish as an independent branch of philosophy. Desjardin holds, "In general, environmental ethics is a systematic account of the moral relations between human beings and their natural environment. Environmental ethics assumes that ethical norms can and do govern human behaviour towards the natural world. A theory of environmental ethics, then, must go on to explain what these norms are, to whom or to what humans have responsibilities, and how these responsibilities are justified." (Desjardins, 2013, p.17) Philosophical ethics is the next level of generality and abstraction, at which we analyze and evaluate normative judgments and their supporting reasons. This is the level of the general concepts, principles, and theories to which we appeal in defending and explaining normative claims. This is the level at which philosophers are most comfortable and have the most to offer. The essence of philosophical ethics involves evaluating reasons that support normative judgments or seeking to clarify the concepts involved in such judgment. In this sense, environmental ethics is a branch of philosophy engaged in the systematic study and evaluation of the normative judgments that are so much a part of environmentalism. (Tabak and Ramanan, 2014, p.25) The environment includes all the natural features of the land, water, flora, and fauna which support human life and influence its development and character. On the other hand, Religion can be defined as a belief in a supernatural power or powers to be obeyed and worshipped and its expression in conduct and ritual. (Tanner & Mitchel, 2002, p.3) Hence, the thought and necessitate for environmental safety and environmental moral values are inbuilt into us and can endow us with insight for changing our anthropocentric approach to an ecological and life-centric approach. Environmental ethics are not just theoretical initiatives, they consecrate in our religious conduct.

Objectives:

1. To learn the concept of environmental ethics in general.
2. To understand the significance of environmental ethics in safeguarding the environment and promoting a strong connection with the environment.
3. To study the role of nature in different major religions of the world
4. To bring light on the environmental issues and their significance to maintaining a sustainable man environment relationship.

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Methodology: To carry out the proposed research paper logically and systematically both primary and secondary sources have been utilized. In philosophical research, both analytical and descriptive research methods are hugely used. Apart from using these two methods, here, more or fewer observation methods have also been applied. As secondary sources of data different books, journals, as well as articles, searched both in the library and internet have been taken into account.

Discussion and Analysis: Ethics is a field in philosophy that focuses on explaining and defending judgments about right and wrong conduct. We often think of ethics as being about what rules you should follow to be a good person. But we can also define ethics more broadly as the study of what contributes to a good or choice-worthy human life. That is, it's not only about rules but also about what goals are good to pursue, how to live well and richly in the world. Your relationship with the natural world can contribute to a good life in many ways. Most obviously, we all rely on nature for the food we eat, the clothes we wear, and all the things we use in our lives. The quality of the natural world affects our health and wellness. Using natural resources also affects our relationships with other humans—the people who produced, sold, needed, or bought these things. So our relationship to nature is part of social ethics. (Smith, 2018, p.8) What we may regard as a pleasingly diverse environment may be one that requires active management on our part.

Moreover, there is little point, I would suggest, in arguing that nature should be left free from our meddling. Non-interference in nature is no more an option for us than for any other mammal. It is the form of our meddling that raises moral, aesthetic, and policy issues. In saying this, I am not arguing that there are no cases for land to be put aside or protected from human interference. (Berry Frse, 1993, p.17) There is no doubt that human beings have affected the world—in creative and aesthetic ways, but also in ways that have caused death for many other species and devastating pollution worldwide. To speak of our environment, therefore, is to take the first step in being responsible for these devastating impacts. Our challenge is to create an upcycling culture that is sustainable within the environmental constraints of the Earth's biosphere. (Traer, 2020,p.14)The environmental movement that in the United States began in the 1970s demanded laws and regulations to protect human health from the dangerous chemicals polluting the air and water systems of the planet. (Traer, 2020, p.14) The natural resources that sustain life on our planet—the climate, air, water, and soil—are being changed, polluted or depleted at alarming rates.

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Human population growth is increasing exponentially. The world population reached 7 billion people in 2011, just 12 years after reaching 6 billion. Although it took all of human history until 1804 for the world population to first reach 1 billion people, the most recent increase of 1 billion took just 12 years. The rate of population increase is slowing somewhat. It is estimated that it may take 15 years to add the next 1 billion people. Unfortunately, however, disease, famine, poverty, and war are among the factors contributing to this decline in the rate of growth. The prospects for continued degradation and depletion of natural resources multiply with population growth. (Sesjardins, 2013, p.7) Philosophical ethics is just this process of stepping back to reflect on our decision-making. Philosophical ethics involves a self-conscious stepping back from our own lives to reflect on what type of life we should live, how we should act, and what kind of people we should be. This textbook will introduce environmental ethics by working across two levels of thought: the practical level of deciding what we should do and how we should live, and the more abstract and academic level of stepping back to think about how we decide what to do and what to value. (Desjardins, 2013, p.7)

The landscape of environmental ethics is divided into anthropocentric and eco-centric systems. "Anthropocentric" means human-centered. These ethics are based on the premise that only human life has intrinsic value (that is, it is good in itself); nonhuman life is valuable only to the extent it contributes to human goods. Eco-centric ethics recognize that nonhuman lives are also an intrinsic value; it can be an end in itself. The more radical eco-centric argue that human life has no greater moral value than nonhuman life; all living things have equal value. Two influential schools of eco-centric ethics are Deep Ecology and Ecofeminism. (Smith, 2018, p.19-20) From above, it seems that at present, there is a demand for a multifaceted shift in the way to gain knowledge in equalizing the subject of worldwide climate transformation. Revaluating the most fundamental observation concerning nature has to be the concern of philosophers. This upgrades the suitable connection of human beings with the environment. Accepting and understanding the implication of environmental ethics would do well equally for people and the environment. People will not turn out to be engaged in environmental inventiveness such as protection and safeguarding if they do not set a high value on the environment. Moral practices are something that individuals develop into paying attention to and are concerned about only after they have learned about and understood the issue of water and air effluence or the other loss of the ecosystem. Environmental ethics is the learning of how a human being and their natural environment interrelate. The human being

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must grow knowledge of our surroundings and how to live in this world in peace with the environment. The balance of our ecosystem must maintain to live peacefully. In the accumulation of population growth depletion of possessions has bothered the natural stability. Machinery development and monetary expansion have generated problems with nature. Moral principles acts a considerable part in assessing improvement processes and it turns out to be a significant branch. Several matters regarding the environment require human beings' moral fondness. Here, Taback and Ramanan said, “We recommend environmental professionals meet regularly to discuss how to be alert to potential ethical issues in their field and how to solve the dilemmas that arise. Upon recognizing an ethical dilemma in the field, we strongly recommend it be reviewed and discussed with one several supervisors or colleagues before any action is taken. When more than one stakeholder is involved, the right thinking for one stakeholder could make another stakeholder uncomfortable. The solution to an ethical dilemma could be a compromise to minimize the impact without seriously affecting the rights or health of another stakeholder. The techniques for resolving such dilemmas are never intuitive and require training, which can be given through periodic workshops presenting hypothetical dilemmas faced by environmental professionals. (Taback and Ramanan, p.16-17).

The care for the environment has been congenital in the demeanor of religious life from a very early age. Each religion of the Word has its unique way and moral values to guide a man on how to behave or treat another man and the other creatures of this world in a good manner along with practicing day-to-day life rituals. Hence, different religions differently or in their way, offer a unique set of moral values and rules to guide human beings in their relationship with the environment. Religion plays a big role in forming man's mindset towards the world of nature. Vedic and Hindu religions, Buddhism, Islam as well as Jain religious traditions recognized the ideologies of environmental harmony from a very early age. Now let us turn our attention toward some major world religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, Islamism, Jainism, etc., and explore the religious faith of these religions concerning nature.

Environment or nature from a Religious perspective:

Hinduism: Hinduism is the name used in the west to designate the traditional socio-religious structure of the Indian people. Those Indians who are not followers of the distinct teachings of Islam—Jainism or—Sikhism are generally referred to as “Hindu”(Fischer-Schreiber et al., 1989, p.130). It is very hard to

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define Hinduism in a proper sentence. Hinduism is one of the very oldest religions existing in this world. Almost 80% of people of India are the follower of Hinduism. The follower of Hinduism is not only restricted in India. Larger numbers of Hindu people are found in countries like -Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Pakistan, South Africa, the USA, Canada, etc.

From all aspects, Hinduism sermonized and exercised conformity with the natural world. The Holy Scriptures of Hindu religious beliefs like Mahabharata, Ramayana, Veda, Upanishad, Gita, and Purana all include abundant information regarding the protection and conservation of the environment and environmental variance. The natural world has never been measured as an antagonistic element to be occupied or conquered. In reality, man is taught to live in cooperation with nature and identifies the spirituality that exists in every component, including the flora and fauna. The big martyr and prophets of ancient times had shown immense admiration and value for nature. Hinduism always respects the creations of God. Hinduism is a religion that is based on Vedic beliefs. In Vedic prophecy, nature has been considered a crucial part of the life of human beings. The five main components or the *panca mahabhutas* namely earth, water, fire, air, and ether, and all the living and non-living things of this world are bound within the great rhythm of nature called *Rta* which covers all from the stream of season. From the very earlier time, Vedic Hindu people are worshiping the floras and faunas with their prayers considering them as the incarnation of Gods and Goddesses. Hindus are offering water, sweets, fruits, and flowers in their prayers to the tree deities as well as encircling these trees with the sacred thread. The follower of Hinduism believes that Rocks, Mountains like- the Himalayas, and Rivers such as Ganga, and the Yamuna, all are sacred things associated with different gods and goddesses. They also believe that there is a deity in every tree and He is called *vrksa devota*.

According to the Hindu religious belief, the trees and animals are related to some deities. For example, the *Tulsi* tree is believed to be a tree of Lakshmi and Bishnu deity, the *Bel* tree is considered as an auspicious tree related to God Siva, etc. Among the animals, Lion is considered a symbol of Goddess Durga, the Peacock as the God Kartika, the Swan as Goddess Saraswati, etc. From the above, it is clear that Hinduism has shown their love and respect towards nature in different ways as well as very much concerned about the protection and preservation of the natural world believing that all are the creation of

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the same God. Hinduism always had environmentally responsive beliefs. It put down a great deal emphasizing environmental moral principles.

Buddhism: Buddhism is the religion of the awakened one; one of the three great world religions. It was founded by the historical Buddha—Shakyamuni in the 6th to 5th centuries B.C.E. The basic thought of Buddhism is summed up in the—Tripitaka. The Buddhist community(--sangha) consists of monks and nuns (--bhikshu,--bhikshumi) as well as lay followers (upasaka).(Fischer-Schreiber et al., 1989, p.50) Buddhism is a religion begun around 500 BCE. Buddhism has a larger number of followers. Buddhism does not believe in the authority of the Veda. That is why it comes under the heterodox Indian philosophical systems. Gautama Buddha is believed to be the founder of this religion. He was an ethical teacher of Buddhism. The principle of Buddhist philosophy and ethics essentially reclines on the four noble truths of Buddhism. Buddhism does not believe in any God and Goddess. Instead of that Buddhism provides a set of strategies for spiritual growth. The central principles of Buddhism comprise the principle of suffering, impermanence, and non-self. The main purpose of Buddhism is to overcome the suffering given to us by our mortal life. Buddhism is based on the four noble truths as the significant principles of Buddhism and is advised to follow seriously these principles. Buddhism also provides eightfold paths as the practical implication of their four noble truths. These are -the right view, right aspiration, right speech, right conduct, right livelihood, right effort, right awareness, and right concentration. Buddhism avoids killing or harming any living object on earth.

Another significant characteristic of Buddhism is that it emphasizes the importance of ecology or environmentalism. Like the other religious faith of the world, Buddhism also advocates peaceful coexistence with nature. Buddhism explains how human beings and nature are parts of the same whole and how they are mutually dependent on each other. Buddhism is intensely concerned with the aesthetic appeal of nature. Buddhism spread the exercise of sympathy and nonviolence not only to human beings but, to all living creatures. Buddhism also teaches us the significance of a kind attitude towards the environment and its parts. Buddhism's moral accomplish is to spread worldwide love and sympathy for all living creatures and believes in the law of Karma according to which whatever one sows one reaps. If one does good action he will pay good fruits. So, one must be very careful before doing anything. Cause and

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effect are intimately related to each other. If we do anything bad to the environment or other creatures of the world we will get back the same from them.

Islamism: Islam is another largest religion in this world. It is a monotheistic religion. The founder of Islam is the prophet, Mohammed. The main Holy Scripture of Islamism is Quran. Islam is considered a religion of the Muslim People and a religion of peace. In Quran, it is mentioned that nature is the creation of Allah. He is the creator of all things of this universe. Nature stands as a sign of Almighty's creation. Since the Creation or nature is referred to as the signs (ayat) of Allah and this is also the name given to the verses of the Quran. 'Ayat' means signs, symbols, or proof of the divine. (Gada, 2014, p.131) The distinction between the Creator and created makes the latter in Islam (e.g. nature, animals, humans, and other creatures) a unified class of God's creation. (Gada, 2014, p.132) According to Islamism, we should never hurt nature for the well-being of both nature and humans and suggest maintaining an everlasting harmony between these two. For this, we should always safeguard, restore and protect our nature and natural resources.

All the essential elements of earth like water, air, soil, animals, and plants should be protected and need to be taken care of. The main duty of man is to protect God's auspicious nature and its components from any harm. If nature gets harmed by any acts of any human being then it is considered an injustice to nature according to Islamism. Spiritualists, saints as well as the seers have generally explained Islam as the religion for guidance and amelioration of the world. The followers of Islamism are advised to practice the five pillars of Islamism or the five main components of this religion. The first pillar is to believe in only one Allah, prayer is the second pillar of Islamism which offer their believer numerous prospects all through the way to believe in God for all of his blessings and request God for help out all other endeavors.

The third pillar is fasting, which is an opportunity for self-reflection and development. The fourth pillar is the zakat according to which we must have respect and love for all mankind. The fifth pillar is hajj. Hence, Islam teaches that part and basic character of humans on this earth is that of *khalifa*. The word *khalifa* means the trustee of God. Islam believes that humans are handed over the duty of safe maintenances of Earth and its diverse creation.

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Christianity: As a religion, Christianity is considered one of the major diffused religions with huge followers of any religious conviction in this world. Christianity is one of the universal religions which embraces every people without judging their nationality, colour, language, tradition race, and so on. Jesus Christ was the founder of this religion emerged in the first century of the Common Era. The main scripture of Christianity is the Holy Bible. Bible is believed to be the word of God. The Bible is again divided into two chief divisions, namely the Old Testament and the New Testament. Like the other religious faith, the Christian religious faith is also deeply connected with nature. According to this religious faith, nature is a gift of God to us out of which the entire world is created. The followers of Christianity believe that there is a spiritual consonance between nature and its parts. God created human beings as well as nature. Man and woman both are the creation of his reflection, and delegated them an exceptional power above the entire perceptible objects and living thing. Christianity teaches that the entire creation is an adoring work of the almighty and that humankind may not devastate the natural diversity of God's creation. The human being should maintain a peaceful relationship with nature.

Jainism: Jainism is a very old living religious faith of the world. Jainism is believed to be a religion of the Jainas. It is a religious system advocated and developed by the Jinas. Although the devotees of Jainism spread all over India, the majority are found in Maharashtra, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh as well as in Uttar Pradesh of Western India. The literal meaning of the Jinas is 'conquerors of self'. As a religion, Jainism is considered as the offshoot of Hinduism, but it is associated with the non-orthodox system, which rejected the authority of the Vedas. From the aspect of originality, we may say that it is a purely indigenous religion that stands for the *sramana* of the Indian oldest culture and tradition. According to Jainism, there are 24 Tirthankaras or teachers in Jainism. Mahavira (599-527 B.C) is believed to be the last Tirthankaras of Jainism. Digambara "sky-clad" (and thus naked) and the Svetambaraa "White clade" are the two main sects of Jainism. Jainism is considered a dualist and pluralistic religion in its nature. It is dualistic because the central teaching of Jainism is based on the division of Jiva and Ajiva. Again, it is pluralistic because Jainism believed in the infinite numbers of both animate and inanimate souls. The main scientific assumption based on which Jainism began is that nothing is destructible. As a religion, Jainism is so intimately connected to nature. The central theme of Jainism is that nature is alive. All things have some form of the soul from that rock to the small creatures. Jainism bestowed a spiritualistic thought on both the material and non-material objects of the world. The main concept of Jainism on

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which Jainism is based in the concept of non-violence. It instructs us to practice ahimsa or non-violence towards other human beings and all of nature because the world is the creation of both animate and inanimate objects together. It considers the reciprocal dependence of every part of nature to go mutually and bound in an intricate bond. Hence, we may say that Jainism is a very environment-friendly religion that always tries to protect these creations of the cosmos whether it is material or non-material through their moral and spiritual principles.

Other religion like Judaism, Sikhism, etc. outlines a series of ethical obligation including several relevant to the conservation of nature believing that all forms in the universe exist under God's order and that has brought life into being, God will look after it.

Conclusion

The endorsement of ecological ethics was taken into reflection, to assist guard of future generations deriving from ecological threads and calamity. Environmental ethics is a vital perception for the reason that it helps out in building our ethical principles and obligation that people should have toward our environment. Nevertheless, religious conviction is habitually measured as the most extensively used method to construct moral assessment and carry out ethical interpretation. The majority of world religions are environment affable and split a universal ethic stands on peace with the environment. Furthermore, the Indian orthodox, as well as heterodox philosophical systems, have a very impinging connection with the natural world through their diverse notion and inspections on the topic of Brahman, God, Jagat, Jiva, and so on. Almost all Indian and western philosophical systems respect the natural world as it is believed that the environment is closely related to our spirituality. Therefore Indian civilization is retaining a very adjacent connection with the environment through its principles, regions, convictions, customs, and traditions as well as through their cultural and religious practices.

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