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Framework of Environmental Ethics: An Overview

Sujit Mondal

Research Scholar, Department of Philosophy, Mansarovar Global University, Sehore, M.P, India.

ABSTRACT

Environmental ethics is an interdisciplinary field that explores the moral principles governing the relationship between human beings and the natural environment. It discusses key approaches, including anthropocentrism, biocentrism, ecocentrism, deep ecology, land ethics, ecofeminism, and sustainability ethics, highlighting their contributions to understanding human responsibilities toward nature. The study also emphasizes the significance of religious and cultural traditions, particularly Hinduism and Buddhism, in promoting ecological values such as non-violence, compassion, interconnectedness, and respect for all forms of life. These ethical principles provide valuable guidance for addressing pressing global issues, including climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution, deforestation, and unsustainable resource exploitation. Furthermore, the paper explores the role of environmental ethics in influencing environmental policy, conservation strategies, sustainable development, and public awareness. By integrating philosophical, cultural, and ecological perspectives, the framework of environmental ethics offers a holistic approach to balancing human development with environmental protection. In this article; the framework of environmental ethics was discussed.

Keywords: *Framework, Environmental, Ethics.*

INTRODUCTION

Environmental ethics is a branch of applied philosophy that examines the moral relationship between human beings and the natural environment. It seeks to determine the ethical principles that should guide human interactions with nature, including the conservation of biodiversity, sustainable use of natural resources, and protection of ecosystems. As environmental challenges such as climate change, deforestation, pollution, biodiversity loss, and resource depletion continue to intensify, environmental ethics has emerged as an essential framework for addressing these global concerns from a moral and philosophical perspective. The framework of environmental ethics extends beyond traditional anthropocentric views, which place humans at the centre of moral consideration, to include non-anthropocentric approaches that recognize the intrinsic value of animals, plants, species, and ecosystems. It incorporates diverse philosophical perspectives, including anthropocentrism, biocentrism, ecocentrism, deep ecology, ecofeminism, land ethics, and sustainability ethics, each offering distinct principles for understanding humanity's responsibilities toward the environment. Environmental ethics also draws upon religious, cultural, and indigenous traditions, many of which emphasize harmony between humans and nature. In traditions such as Hinduism and Buddhism, ethical teachings promote respect for all living beings, non-violence, compassion,



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interconnectedness, and ecological balance. These perspectives contribute significantly to contemporary discussions on environmental conservation and sustainable development. The framework of environmental ethics provides a comprehensive foundation for evaluating environmental issues, shaping public policies, promoting responsible environmental behavior, and fostering sustainable development. It encourages individuals, communities, institutions, and governments to adopt ethical values that support the protection and preservation of the natural world for present and future generations. The objective of the study is to explore the framework of environmental ethics.

CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICAL FRAMEWORKS

Anthropocentrism is the perspective that human beings are the primary or most important entities in the world and that nature holds value primarily to the extent that it fulfils human desires. Although it has significantly influenced contemporary policy and development paradigms, it possesses some critical flaws. A significant constraint is its limited ethical framework. Anthropocentrism ascribes intrinsic moral significance predominantly to people, relegating non-human entities and ecosystems to instrumental status. This establishes an ethical hierarchy that frequently overlooks the intrinsic value of biodiversity and natural systems. A further drawback is its contribution to environmental damage. By emphasising immediate human advantages—such as industrial expansion, resource exploitation, and consumption—it has substantially contributed to deforestation, pollution, climate change, and the decline of biodiversity. Nature is frequently perceived as a repository of resources rather than a dynamic ecosystem. Anthropocentrism is likewise plagued by the logic of unsustainable development. It often conflates human advancement with economic growth, neglecting to account for natural constraints. This results in the overexploitation of natural resources and jeopardises long-term environmental stability. Another problem is its inability to acknowledge ecological interdependence. Contemporary ecology demonstrates that humans are intricately integrated into ecosystems, reliant on non-human organisms and natural processes. Anthropocentrism artificially divides humans from nature, undermining a comprehensive understanding of the environment. It also raises questions over intergenerational inequity. By prioritising current human demands, it frequently overlooks the rights and welfare of future generations, resulting in the exhaustion of resources essential for subsequent societies. Moreover, anthropocentric perspectives might diminish the significance of non-human suffering and ecological damage, complicating the ethical resolution of matters such as animal rights, habitat degradation, and species extinction. Ultimately, it fosters a domination-centric perspective, perceiving nature as an entity to be controlled rather than cohabited with. This perspective constrains the advancement of more equitable ethical frameworks, such as biocentrism and ecocentrism, which prioritise ecological equilibrium and reverence for all forms of life (O’Brolcháin, F., 2023).

Implementing biocentric and ecocentric ethics poses numerous practical, intellectual, and socio-economic obstacles, notwithstanding their compelling moral appeal in environmental philosophy. A significant difficulty is the discord with prevailing development paradigms. Biocentrism and ecocentrism need the prioritisation of ecological integrity and the inherent value of all life forms,



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frequently conflicting with industrial expansion, urbanisation, and market-orientated economic systems. In practice, governments and corporations often prioritise human economic welfare over ecological constraints, complicating full implementation. A notable concern is the challenge of ethical decision-making in actual conflicts. Ecocentric and biocentric ethics often lack clarity in situations where values conflict, such as when the protection of a species necessitates limitations on human lifestyles or when ecosystem restoration impacts local communities. This engenders ethical ambiguity in policy execution. The difficulty of public acceptability and cultural adaptation also exists. Numerous countries remain entrenched in anthropocentric ideologies, prioritising human needs above all else. Transforming public perception to afford equal moral respect to non-human life necessitates enduring educational, cultural, and philosophical change. Another constraint is the challenge of translating legal and institutional texts. Contemporary legal frameworks prioritise human rights and property rights, rather than ecological rights or the inherent value of nature. Incorporating ecosystem-based ethics into legislation necessitates a sophisticated reorganisation of environmental governance structures. A further difficulty is the scientific uncertainty and intricacy of ecosystems. Ecocentric ethics presupposes a comprehensive comprehension of ecological equilibrium; nevertheless, ecosystems are dynamic, non-linear, and frequently unpredictable. This complicates identifying behaviours that genuinely protect ecological integrity. Ultimately, there exists the possibility of operational inflexibility. The rigorous implementation of biocentric or ecocentric concepts may occasionally clash with pressing human necessities, including poverty reduction, infrastructural advancement, or catastrophe management. Reconciling ecological ethics with social justice constitutes a significant challenge in environmental philosophy. Although biocentric and ecocentric methods provide a more comprehensive moral framework than anthropocentrism, their application necessitates addressing significant conflicts among ethics, economics, governance, and human survival requirements (Berebon, C.B., Gwatana, J.G., 2022).

The tension between economic advancement and environmental conservation is a fundamental challenge in modern environmental ethics and policy formulation. It derives from the conflict between the necessity for economic advancement—industrialisation, infrastructure development, and resource exploitation—and the imperative to preserve ecosystems, biodiversity, and ecological equilibrium. The essence of this tension lies in the development model, which frequently favours immediate economic benefits over enduring ecological stability. Accelerated industrial expansion enhances productivity, employment, and income; yet, it concurrently results in deforestation, air and water contamination, land degradation, and greenhouse gas emissions. This illustrates a predominantly anthropocentric developmental rationale, wherein nature is regarded chiefly as a resource for human exploitation. A fundamental aspect of the conflict is the dichotomy between resource exploitation and sustainability. Economic development is significantly reliant on natural resources such as minerals, fossil fuels, water, and forests. Excessive extraction results in depletion and environmental damage, jeopardising the foundation for future development. This generates a conflict between current economic advantages and future ecological stability. A significant concern is industrialisation and its associated pollution. Industries propel economic advancement but also



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produce waste, hazardous pollutants, and environmental risks. Developing nations frequently have a challenging trade-off: stringent environmental rules may impede industrial progress, whereas lenient regulations may result in significant ecological harm and public health emergencies. The discord is also apparent in urbanisation and alterations in land usage. The expansion of urban areas, roadways, and infrastructure frequently necessitates the clearance of forests and arable land, thereby altering ecosystems and displacing wildlife. Although urban expansion fosters economic advancement, it can significantly diminish ecological resilience. Another issue is the disparity in environmental impact. The advantages of economic development are inequitably allocated, but environmental degradation disproportionately impacts marginalised populations. This presents concerns about environmental justice, as marginalised communities endure the repercussions of pollution and resource exhaustion while lacking equitable access to developmental benefits. This clash underscores the inadequacies of exclusively growth-focused approaches and advocates for sustainable development, which aims to reconcile economic advancement with environmental preservation. It underscores that growth must function within ecological constraints and account for intergenerational accountability. Biocentric and ecocentric ethical frameworks contest the supremacy of commercial interests by asserting that nature possesses intrinsic value independent of human utility. Nevertheless, incorporating these viewpoints into practical policy is intricate due to conflicting human necessities, including poverty alleviation, job creation, and infrastructure advancement. The discord between economic advancement and environmental conservation is not merely a dichotomy but a fundamental tension inside contemporary civilisation. Addressing this issue necessitates a re-evaluation of development paradigms, enhancement of environmental governance, and the implementation of a balanced strategy that guarantees both human welfare and ecological sustainability (Khan, T.R. & Gupta, V.L., 2018).

The ethical dilemmas related to climate change, resource consumption, and biodiversity depletion are among the most urgent themes in modern environmental philosophy. They pose essential enquiries regarding justice, accountability, and the ethical connection between humanity and the natural world. Climate change is predominantly caused by greenhouse gas emissions from industrialised nations, although its effects are unevenly distributed worldwide. A significant ethical concern is climate injustice: states and populations that contribute minimally to emissions—typically developing and vulnerable countries—experience the most severe repercussions, including sea-level rise, extreme weather events, and food poverty. A further issue is intergenerational equity. Current generations are reaping the advantages of fossil-fuel-driven progress, whilst future generations will endure the enduring repercussions of environmental deterioration. This prompts enquiries on our ethical obligations to individuals who have yet to come into existence. Additionally, there exists the matter of historical accountability. Industrialised nations have significantly contributed to cumulative emissions, establishing an ethical responsibility for mitigation, adaptation assistance, and climate financing for less affluent countries. From an ethical perspective, climate change complicates conventional concepts of responsibility due to the diffuse, global, and frequently indirect nature of harm, rendering accountability challenging to establish. The utilisation of natural resources prompts



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enquiries on equity, sustainability, and the proprietorship of nature. Excessive consumption by wealthy cultures results in the exhaustion of limited resources, including fossil fuels, minerals, water, and forests. An essential ethical concern is unsustainable exploitation—utilising resources at a pace that exceeds their natural replenishment. This contravenes the concepts of ecological equilibrium and long-term accountability. A further issue is resource disparity. Affluent nations and entities frequently utilise an unequal fraction of global resources, whereas impoverished societies encounter scarcity and environmental deterioration. This engenders both global and local inequalities. The ethical dilemma over whether nature ought to be regarded as a commodity or as a shared heritage persists. Numerous environmental philosophers contend that ecosystems ought not to be commodified, as this disregards their inherent ecological worth. Biodiversity loss includes species extinction and ecosystem degradation, frequently resulting from habitat destruction, pollution, climate change, and overexploitation. An essential ethical concern is the inherent worth of non-human existence. From biocentric and ecocentric viewpoints, species possess intrinsic value irrespective of human utility, and their extinction constitutes a moral transgression in its own right. The depletion of ecological services, including pollination, water purification, and climate management, directly impacts human life. Depleting biodiversity compromises environmental stability and jeopardises future human welfare. The issue of moral irreversibility also exists. Species extinction is irreversible; once lost, biodiversity cannot be reinstated. This elevates the ethical significance of human activities that inflict lasting damage. Biodiversity loss signifies an inequitable distribution of responsibility and advantage: economic activities like deforestation, mining, and industrial agriculture frequently benefit certain individuals at the expense of ecosystems and indigenous communities (Intongpan, P., 2019).

AN INTEGRATED FRAMEWORK OF ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

Integrating philosophical traditions for ecological sustainability entails amalgamating concepts from various ethical, cultural, and metaphysical frameworks to establish a more comprehensive environmental ethic. No singular tradition comprehensively addresses the intricacies of ecological challenges, including climate change, biodiversity loss, and resource depletion; hence, a diverse approach is deemed essential. Western environmental ethics prioritises systematic moral reasoning. Philosophers in environmental ethics, such as Aldo Leopold, introduced the Land Ethic, which broadens moral consideration to encompass soils, waterways, plants, and animals. Arne Naess similarly promoted deep ecology, advocating for the intrinsic significance of all life forms. Utilitarian and duty-based ethics (e.g., Bentham, Mill, Kant) offer frameworks for assessing environmental policy based on outcomes, harm mitigation, and ethical responsibility. Hindu philosophy underscores the sanctity of nature through notions such as Prakriti, Dharma, and the interdependence of all entities. Buddhism emphasises interconnection and compassion for all sentient beings. Jainism ardently advocates for ahimsa (non-violence), bestowing ethical regard upon all life forms, encompassing microbes. These traditions advocate for moderation, non-exploitation, and spiritual equilibrium with nature instead of domination over it. Biocentrism confers moral



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consideration upon all living entities. Ecocentrism emphasises ecosystems and ecological wholes over individual creatures. They collaboratively facilitate the reconciliation of spiritual, ethical, and scientific perspectives on nature. Integrating philosophical traditions does not entail merging them into a singular system but rather establishing a dialogical framework wherein each tradition contributes its distinct merits. The integration of Western analytical rigour, Indian spiritual ecology, and contemporary ecological research establishes a more robust ethical framework for confronting current environmental issues (Framarin, C.G., 2012).

Moral responsibility in ethics denotes the obligation of individuals and institutions to behave in ethically appropriate manners, prevent harm, and enhance the welfare of society and the environment. In the context of modern environmental concerns, this obligation is collective, multifaceted, and interrelated. In the context of environmental ethics, philosophers such as Aldo Leopold contend that humans are "mere members and citizens" of the natural community, rather than its dominators. This broadens moral responsibility to encompass the entire "land community", extending beyond persons and organisations. Likewise, contemporary ethical frameworks like ecocentrism assert that accountability should account for ecosystems in their entirety, rather than solely human concerns. Contemporary moral obligation is both collective and structural. Individuals should embrace ethical living and civic participation, while institutions must establish and implement sustainable frameworks. Ecological balance, justice, and long-term sustainability can only be attained via the collective responsibility of all parties.

CONCLUSION

Environmental ethics establishes the moral and philosophical basis for the appropriate relationship between humans and the natural world. It transcends legal regulations and technical remedies by confronting fundamental issues of value, accountability, and justice in human-nature interactions. Given the urgency of climate change, biodiversity decline, and resource exhaustion, environmental ethics is crucial for fostering a sustainable future. Environmental ethics is a philosophical discipline that investigates the intrinsic value of nature and the obligations humans hold towards non-human species and ecosystems. A significant contribution of environmental ethics is the broadening of the moral community to include non-human entities. Environmental ethics underpins sustainable development by advocating for the judicious utilisation of natural resources, fostering environmental justice and equity, incorporating ecological considerations into economic and political decisions, and endorsing conservation and restoration initiatives. It transitions development from immediate profit to enduring ecological equilibrium. Environmental ethics is essential in addressing climate change, carbon emissions, deforestation, habitat destruction, water scarcity, pollution, and biodiversity loss. It offers the ethical rationale for international collaboration and enhanced environmental governance. Environmental ethics constitutes the intellectual foundation for a sustainable future by reinterpreting humanity's role within nature. It substitutes domination with accountability, exploitation with stewardship, and immediate profit with sustainable ecological equilibrium. Environmental ethics, by incorporating concepts from philosophers like Leopold and Næss and broadening moral



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consideration to encompass all life forms, provides an essential foundation for attaining genuine sustainability in contemporary society. Humanity confronts interrelated ecological issues, including climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution, and resource depletion. These challenges encompass not only scientific or technology dilemmas but also profound ethical and philosophical concerns. Philosophical environmental ethics is pertinent here, as it offers a moral framework for reevaluating human interactions with nature. Philosophical environmental ethics is crucial. It establishes the ethical basis for confronting ecological issues, advancing justice, and reinterpreting humanity's position within nature. By contesting anthropocentrism and advocating for ecological stewardship, it fosters a more equitable, just, and sustainable future for all species on Earth.

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