

STUDY OF ENVIRONMENT AND FUTURE GENERATION: SOME PHILOSOPHICAL STRANDS

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ABSTRACT :- The issue of protection and preservation of natural resources is a crucial one when it is seen from ethical perspective. There are two opposite kinds of doctrines popular in this realm, such as, anthropocentrism and non-anthropocentrism. It is, though appears to be obvious, but difficult to determine why human being should be responsible and dutiful to their next generation as well as to the nature. Whether it is only the matter of sustainability of human existence in a known and comfortable way or is it connected with the idea of essence of human life and self? In this way the ethical issues turn into the investigation of their philosophical foundations and this endeavor may disclose the greater understanding of our duties towards future generations.

KEYWORDS:- Nature, Anthropocentric, responsibility, reverence for life, ecology.

INTRODUCTION:-

Since last two years almost we are facing a new threat to our survival. Though we do not have clear idea about the source of emergence of this deadly corona virus, still most of the environmental issues are effects of human activities. The severity of each problem is so intense that sometimes we feel helpless and sometimes we just avoid the role that could prevent to some extent. When governments and other different org try to find out some solutions and seek our support, we do not always act responsibly. Sustainability is the key to prevent or reduce the problems prevailing in some country or other. Now it is almost definite that we are living unsustainably, and hardcore effort of every individual is needed to pay back to the nature against the use of natural resources to sustainable limit. Still the question comes whether the problems will be resolved in pleasant ways of our own choice or we have to fall through more dangerous pandemics and all. What is the future? What are we going to leave for our future generations? Should

not we leave some precious and necessary resources for future human race as well as for the planet itself?

THE WESTERN TRADITION OF ENVIRONMENTAL THOUGHTS:-

We can discuss the western ideas from two basic perspectives, firstly from the perspective of Holy Bible or basic Christian theological doctrines and then from the ancient Greek ideas of the great Aristotle. The Holy Bible states that God is the creator of all things, rules overall and deserves our worship and adoration. This planet is the manifestation of omniscient and omnipotent God, consequently governed and sustained by His unending eternal power. He has created men and women reflecting his own image and has given the privilege to command over other creatures of the world and to exercise stewardship over the earth. We must focus on the idea of Stewardship. According to the doctrine, God has given us knowledge and righteousness and the power to dominate the earth. But our Stewardship under the surveillance of God includes our moral accountability and best service to fulfill the objectives of God. Hence we have some virtues in one hand and some free choice on the other, as our attributes. God's moral law can be revealed in the conscience of human being. Now if we judge the doctrine in the name of one anthropocentric view, we may be challenged by the view of those who may claim this to be Theo-centric by nature. Here in this discussion we can regard this traditional western view based on Bible, as anthropocentric view towards environmental moral discourse.

To quote a famous passage from Aristotle's Politics, — after the birth of animals, plants exist for their sake, and that the other animals exist for the sake of human beings, the tame for use and food, the wild, if not all at least the greater part of them, for food and for the provision of clothing and various instruments. "Now if in nature nothing is incomplete, and nothing in vain, the inference

must be that she has made all animals for the sake of human beings.” (Politics 1.8) Hence, it is clear that the flavor of anthropocentrism had always been present in western traditional ideas which never teach our mind to genuine concern for environment. Even defining moral virtue and vice, fixing the boundaries of moral duty and responsibility towards environment may be distorted if we rest on these doctrines. The question that comes naturally is, if human being is superior to all other creatures then do we get the right not to care for other creatures of the environment on the basis of our innate superior qualities?

A closer observation into the writings of Aristotle may disclose that there are several strands of Aristotle’s thoughts that support his concern about genuine intrinsic value of nature and environment. It should not be taken for granted that Aristotle’s philosophical strand is not bio-centric. As Aristotle has supported teleological doctrine of creation of Universe which admits that every particle of this creation has some goal to realize. The creation of this universe is the manifestation of a divine plan. All small planets and animals strive, by nature, to become fully developed and well-functioning creatures. Their activities to achieve excellence include them in the discourse of moral life. In his *Metaphysics* he says that each life and their activities are interconnected. There is no strict boundary line between human life and non-human entities. So it is not very difficult to find out a domain of holistic approach of his thoughts which is over-lapping with his anthropocentric ideas and this altogether may lead us to think that the anthropocentric view towards nature does not exclude moral responsibility of human being towards nature.

THE DICHOTOMY OF ANTHROPOCENTRIC AND NON-ANTHROPOCENTRIC APPROACH:-

A sustainable environment is essential for the living of present and future generation of human race. This truth is undeniable. But the issue of development of environmental ethics rests in the question whether preservation and protection of environment is necessary only for the benefit of human being? Are cutting trees

and killing animals wrong only because it hampers the ecological balance which is ultimately harmful to our future generation? Do the elements of nature have only instrumental values? Are they valuable for causing good livelihood and enjoyment of human being? Are our responsibilities towards preservation and protection of natural resources and natural entities determined by the claim of our future generation? The view that admits that the needs and necessities of human being is the determining factor of assigning values to natural non-human creatures is known as Anthropocentrism.

It is true that we do prefer to save and protect those things that we think to be precious, for our future generation. We may afford a level of sacrifice for that too. The question is what is wrong in this doctrine of anthropocentrism? The latest trend of human thoughts finds that this doctrine is based on an inferior presupposition regarding moral superiority of human beings to members of other species on this planet. This presupposition is not only wrong but it could be dangerous in consequence. Immanuel Kant in his *Lectures on Ethics (Duties to Animal and Spirits)* suggests that cruelty towards any non-human creature or entity might encourage a person to develop a character which could be desensitized to cruelty towards other humans who are not my friend. Hence cruelty or mentality of destruction towards non-human entities would be considered to be instrumentally wrong, not intrinsically. Thus the doctrine of anthropocentrism involves non-intrinsic wrongness of anthropogenic devastation of nature. Such destruction might hamper the well-being and virtue orientation of human being of present time as well as of future.

After 1970, a new philosophy about environmental ethics developed and on the basis of newly emerged philosophical approach various doctrines towards environment started challenging such anthropocentric views and offered non-anthropocentric values and ideas. In the first place it questioned the fundamental presumption of anthropocentrism i.e., moral superiority of human being in comparison with other non-human elements. Next it developed some rational arguments to

establish intrinsic value of each element of nature. It proposes that each and every element of nature has its own worth and no one else has any right to show disrespect to them. They are valuable as they are the part of the creation, neither for their utility nor for any other issue. This is to recognize their intrinsic value and to respect the feature of being a part of the creation. If the forest is cut once, the link with the past gets lost forever. And the cost will be borne by the upcoming future generations that succeed us on this planet. According to the environmentalists the value of wilderness can be defined in terms of “world heritage”. What we have inherited from our ancestors, we must preserve those for our descendants, irrespective of any other issue. This is certainly called the non-anthropocentric view. Very clearly the difference between two of these views are based on two different culture of thoughts, the first one keeps man as the determining factor of all others and the second one considers man as only a part of the nature and mostly equally valuable comparing to non-humans. In other words it rejects man as superior than others but believes in inter-connectedness of lives and elements of nature. Such a philosophical idea equates care for nature and care for oneself. Some questions crop up from this dichotomy obviously. Two most important of those are to be discussed here as they are connected to the welfare of future generation.

The first is: Can we avoid destruction of natural situation totally such as, deforestation , killing animals , making dams, using electricity, at all? The second is: Can we be sure that future generation will appreciate our endeavor of preservation of wilderness? This is quite obvious that we cannot imagine living back in forest. Hence we need to cut some trees and built some dams but while using and destroying natural resources we should be very careful about the idea of reservation of true wilderness on the earth for the future generation of near and far. Our decisions should consider the scenic and biological significance of the forest and other relevant resources. This argument does not anyhow justify our decisions and our actions taken in terms of our earning more and to create huge amount of employment facility or something like that. In other words utilitarian approach is the worst

justification for deforestation and perhaps for this reason only we have crossed the limit and already have created problems to our own sustainability as well as to the nature. Secondly, this might come true that future generation people would not appreciate and value such preservation to be very precious, especially of those nations who have no poverty and hunger. They might feel that preservation of nature is necessary only for aesthetic enjoyment and for scientific discoveries. Hence understanding the idea of intrinsic value of natural element is neither easy nor clear, when it comes to the question of benefiting future generations.

THE IDEA OF REVERENCE FOR LIFE:-

The idea of reverence for life is found in the ethical theory of Albert Schweitzer who claims this to be the basic moral principle and the highest moral value. Which is a variation of non-anthropocentric view? This idea says that life has an intrinsic value. This idea of intrinsic value decodes a sense of responsibility which characterizes a genuine ethical attitude oriented with spiritual significance. It claims the fundamental similarity and unity of all creatures which is helpful to overcome anthropocentric point of view and also to realize that there is no strong ethical ground on which we can prefer one life comparing to any other.

Albert Schweitzer defends his own view by saying that “true philosophy must commence with the most immediate and comprehensive facts of consciousness”. If we introspect our own will-to-live, which is innate in us, we may find that we want to live in the lap of nature with other creatures which do possess will-to-live for themselves. Whether I am able to understand their sound and voice is uncertain but I must respect their life in terms of respecting their will-to-live. It seems to me an evil to destroy and to check life. This includes fundamental principle of morality and we need not seek this moral foundation outside our own existence but within our own existence as in-built in consciousness. Hence the idea of Reverence for Life is intrinsically valuable and the guiding principle of the sustainability. This view goes against traditional western thoughts

about environment and may face criticisms too. One may ask that if we start living on this principle of reverence for life we have to admit that the entire civilization is based on evil thoughts of mankind. We do show respect for some lives more than other lives. We acknowledge importance of some plants and do not care about others. How can we justify these facts? Perhaps we do not have any strong strand in justifying this other than opting anthropocentric grounds and utilitarian arguments. Hence I feel that anthropocentrism is real but non-anthropocentrism is ideal.

Paul Taylor, another contemporary American philosopher has been defended non-anthropocentric view and rejects anthropocentric view as groundless because he discards the superiority of human being. However, he acknowledges that mankind has a moral responsibility to act in the best interest of other creatures. He argues that man is a member of Earth's community of life. The system of nature is a complicated interconnected web about which we are not fully acquainted. But like man every single creature, every life and non-living element of nature is a center of tools of autonomous choice. Consequently each element is an end in itself, and worthy of moral consideration. These non-anthropocentric ideas actually tend to establish a mystic interconnectedness of all creatures. It also tends to overcome the narrowness present in anthropocentrism. Undoubtedly this kind of view reminds me the ancient Indian thoughts and values of Veda and Upanishads. These scriptures teach us that realization of own self is the ultimate goal of human life. Knowingly or unknowingly life is a journey to know this lesson and it includes an all pervasive nature of life, discarding the separated identity and discovering the non-duality of the ultimate reality.

THE IDEA OF DEEP ECOLOGY:-

The view of Aldo Leopold is also commendable in this regard, especially as a non-anthropocentric view. He redefined the idea of wilderness on the basis of his own experience and realization. His idea is known as Land Ethic which states that the relation between people and land are interconnected. His idea is not only a matter of

discussion in philosophical discourse but also in biological studies too. He says that people's value regarding environment may develop directly from their experiences. He believes that direct contact with nature works as a significant factor in shaping our ability to realize and apply ethical intuitions crossing our self-interest. It has been recognized by him that relationship between people with each other along with land is a complex matter and he describes this as a social evolution for which we need to do thoughtful and hopeful dialog to chalk out our vision about our future generation and future of the nature as well.

It has been observed that Leopold's idea tends to preserve the integrity and stability of the environment without caring the benefit that may come to the account of human life. Hence, for him, the ethical value of non-human is completely independent of their utilitarian value. The natural richness and diversity of the creations of this planet hold intrinsic value and realization of these diverse life-forms man can realize the higher ethical values that, in turn, help to preserve the nature and environment. The philosophical implication of such an idea is to consider that the species or ecosystem not as a collection of individuals but an entity as a whole having moral worth. Otherwise the question may arise how can we assign equal intrinsic value to each bigger and smaller species? The fact that all organisms are part of an inter-related whole does not suggest that they are all of intrinsic worth. They may be having worth as they are needed for the existence of the whole. And the whole may be having worth as it supports the existence of conscious being. So the attempt to establish non-anthropocentric doctrine may include the rival ideas within itself. The actual philosophical hindrance is to assign individuality or self to a species. Do the plants and other ecosystems have morally significant interest to afford moral worth in them independently of their important role in sustaining conscious life? Hence, what is the outcome of the discussion is to understand that non-anthropocentric view is philosophically weaker than its competitor. Also if we argue in this way we have to rest on the argument based on the interest of conscious being.

DEVELOPING ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS:-

Besides environmental movements and campaigns what is found in reality is lack of awareness among mass. They have the scientific information regarding the state-of-affairs and ethical knowledge regarding codes of conduct but still they are careless and insincere about their actions. The probable reason lies in lacking the true emotional attachment along with the spiritual awakening. A true philosophical idea has the power to discern the ability to control oneself-one's impulse, tendencies and attributes. That is why without philosophical clarity of thoughts we fail to survive as organically responsible and therefore neglect our duties. However, the love towards nature will be etched in the minds of each when there will be an awakening of self and people will be compassionate beings truly understanding the greater interconnectedness with self and environment. Every individual has to accept consciously that each person is an entity of the cosmos itself. And the role of apparently insignificant creature may be of some subtle and significant importance. This reminds me the ancient Indian thoughts. Also I do remind the ancient doctrine of Machiavelli namely end justifies the means. To achieve our goal is most important. If we set a goal which requires excellence of man and his thoughts, it must be a value-in-itself. It is not to allow misdeeds or evils. If we can maintain all natural resources in their natural way of life and can create the world full of flowers and fruits, rivers and

forests, fountains and oceans, birds and animals and we can manage to fill our life with unlimited happiness and mutual trust, what else do we need? What else would be better to achieve the Goal?

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