UNIT 3:APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF ENVIRONMENTLISM

UNIT STRUCTURE

3.1 Learning Objectives
3.2 Introduction
3.3 Marxism
3.4 Gandhism
3.5 Ecological Marxists
3.6 Ecofeminism
3.7 Anthropocentrism
3.8 New Ecological Paradigm
3.9 Let Us Sum Up
3.10 Further Reading
3.11 Answers to Check Your Progress
3.12 Model Questions

3.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to-

- learn about different approaches or perspectives through which we can comprehend what environmentalism is
- understand about relevancy as well as applicability of these perspective in contemporary times
- Discussthe root causes of environmental problemsandways to resolve the environmental crisis.

3.2 INTRODUCTION

Environmentalism denotes a social movement that seeks to influence the political process by lobbying, activism, and education in order to protect natural resources and ecosystems. Environmentalism as a movement covers broad areas of institutional oppression. Examples of these oppressions are: consumption of ecosystems and natural resources into waste, dumping waste into disadvantaged communities, air pollution, water

pollution, weak infrastructure, exposure of organic life to toxins, mono culture, anti-polythene drive (jhola movement) and various other focuses.

It is important to mention here that the 1960s built strong cultural momentum for environmental causes, giving birth to the modern environmental movement. Widespread green consciousness moved vertically within society, resulting in a series of federal policy change in the 1970s. This period was known as the 'Environmental Decade' with the creation of the US Environmental Protection Agency and passing of endangered Species Act, Clean Water Act, and amendement to the Clean Air Act. Earth Day of 1970, celebrated by millions of participants, represented the modern age of environmental thought.

One may define environmental movement as organized social activity consciously directed towards promoting sustainable use of natural resources, halting environmental degradation or bringing about environmental restoration. India has wide diversity of environmental movements involving members of one or more categories of omnivores, ecosystem people and ecological refugees. In this multiplicity of movements one may discern seven major strands. Two strands of these are exclusively focused on nature conservation, one on aesthetics, recreational or scientific grounds and the other on the basis of cultural or religious traditions. However, the dominant strands in the Indian environmental movement are those that focus on the question of equity. These have largely arisen out of conflicts between omnivores who have gained disproportionately from economic development and ecosystem people whose livelihoods have been seriously undermined through a combination of resource fluxes biased against them and a growing degradation of the environment. Such movements most often tend to involve a small group of socially conscious omnivores working with larger number of ecosystem people or refugess.

These movements can be called as 'the environmentalism of the poor' to distinguish them from the environmentalism born out of affluence that is such a visible presence in the advanced capitalist societies of the West. There are four broad strands within these movements. The first emphasizes the moral imperative of checking overuse and doing injustice

to the poor, and largely includes Gandhians. The second emphasizes the need to dismantle the unjust social order through struggle, and primarily attracts Marxists (Gadgil and Guha, 1995). The third and fourth gives importance to reconstruction, employing technologies appropriate to the context and the times. We will discuss about all these strands below. Before the beginning of this discussion it is necessary to mention briefly about the emergence of environmental sociology which shares a close relationship with environmentalism.

Environmental Sociology is a scientific and academic production, arising out ofthe social protest movement that arose in the early 1960's and the evidence of the situation caused by the degradation of natural resources and industrial development. The birth of the environmental movement in the 1960s surprised sociologists, as they did not have theoretical modelsto guide their understanding of the relation between society and nature during that time. However the pioneers of classical sociology Marx, Weber and Durkheim had tangentially touched upon the question. Of course one possible source of inspiration for contemporary sociologists seeking to engage with environment is the canon of classical sociologists (Hannigan 1995). Apart from the contribution of classical sociological thinkers, it is important to have knowledge of other perspectives like Gandhism, Ecofeminism, Anthropocentrism etc.In the previous unit, we have discussed about the emergence and scope of Environmental Sociology. In this unit, we shall learn about the various approaches to study Environmentalism. Let us begin our discussion with the contribution of the pioneers of classical sociology.

3.3 MARXISM

The three major classical sociological pioneers Emile Durkheim, Karl Marx and Max Weber had an implicit environmental dimension to their work which had never been bought to the fore. Some commentators have definitely been subdued about the usefulness of their work. However, it is the idea and knowledge of Karl Marx which has elicited the most extensive response from the present day environmental interpreters. Even if Marx

and his collaborator Engle were marginally concerned with environmental degradation, their analysis of social structure and social has become the starting point for many theories on the environment.

Let us begin our discussion with Marx's contribution towards the relationship between man and nature. According to Marx and F. Engle the capitalist mode of production not only alienated the proletariats (working class) from their product which they produced, from the fellow beings and from himself but also from nature itself. Capitalist Agriculture puts a quick profit from the land ahead of the welfare of both human and the soil. As the industrial revolution proceeded through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, rural workers were removed from the land and driven into crowded, polluted cities while the soil itself was drained of its vitality. Therefore capitalism was held responsible for a wide range of social ills, from overpopulation and depletion of natural resources to the alienation of people from the natural world with which they were united. Because of the above mentioned affects of capitalism, Marx and Engel suggested for the overthrow of capitalism as a solution to all these problems. They argued for the establishment of a new relationship between man and nature. However it is not clear what form of such a relationship should be. In Marx's early work the concept of the humanization of nature is proposed. This suggest that human will develop a new understanding of and empathy with nature. A vital question here is that whether this new understanding would be used solely for human emancipation or whether it would take a more ecocentric form in which the powers and capacities of non-human species would be enhanced. In the former case, the humanization of nature might in fact be deployed to eliminate species and organisms that threaten human health.

Contemporary Marxist theory emphasizes not only the role of capitalism but that of the state in fostering ecological destruction. Hanningan says both elected politicians and bureaucrat administrators are depicted as being centrally committed to proposing up the interests of capitalists investors and employers. John Bellamy has pointed towards Marx's theory of metabolic rift . According to him, Marx was wrongly accused of providing little insight into ecological crisis. In fact Marx provided a powerful analysis of the main

ecological crisis of his day: the problem of soil fertility within capitalist agriculture -as well as commenting on the other major ecological crisis of his time like the loss of forests, the pollution of the cities, and Malthusian specter of overpopulation. He has also raised fundamental issues about antagonism of town and country, the necessity of ecological sustainability, and what he called the 'metabolic' relation between human being and nature (Foster 1999).

Marx used the concept of metabolism to describe the complex interaction between society and nature. He observed that metabolism constitutes the fundamental basis on which life is sustained and growth and reproduction become possible. But by 1860s, this organic relationship was being seriously undercut by the practices of capitalist agriculture. Because landowners became profit oriented and they used the land to the optimal extent with the use of fertilizer, pesticides etc, landowners were accused of spoiling the natural fertility of the soil. This, of course, is exactly still occurring where monoculture prevails (monoculture is cultivation of single variety of crop for commercial purpose). Marx describes this as metabolic rift- the estrangement of human being from the natural world of the soil. This paralleled the estrangement of workers from their labour and was attributable to the same source- capitalism (Hanningan 2006). For Foster the importance of Marx's theory of metabolic rift lies not just in his repatriation of Karl Marx as an advocate of organic agriculture but also in his successful application of sociological thinking to the ecological realm (Foster 1999).

It is important to mention here that Marx appears to be an early advocate of organic farming methods which is evident from the fact that he wrote extensively on the benefits of spreading manure on crop lands, even suggesting that human waste from the city be recycled as fertilizers rather than polluting the rivers and oceans.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q1: Define Environmentalism.

Q2: Name three claasical sociologists who have contributed towards environmental Sociology.

Q3: What do you meant by metabolic rift?

3.4 GANDHISM

The first strand,we have mentioned in the introduction itself which emphasizes the moral imperative of checking overuse and doing justice to the poor is called 'crusading Gandhian'. It actually relies heavily on moral/ religious viewpoint in its rejection of modern way of life. Environmental degradation is viewed above all as a moral problem, its origins lying in the wider acceptance of the ideology of materialism and consumerism. Because both of these ideologies draw humans beingsaway from natureand it encourages wasteful lifestyles. Crusading Gandhians argue that the essence of 'Eastern' cultures is their indifference, even hostility, to economic gain. Thus if India were to abandon its pursuit of Western model of economic development, it would only be returning to its cultural roots. Therefore, these environmentalists call for a return to pre colonial and pre capitalists village society , which they uphold as the exemplar of social and ecological harmony. Crusading Gandhians have worked hard in spreading their message of moral regeneration not only across the country but also across the globe. They have sharply attacked the strange hold of modernist philosophies -particularly those upholding rationalism and economic growth.-on the Indian intelligentsia. With the help of both written and spoken word, they propagate an alternative non modern philosophy whose root lies in Indian tradition.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q4: Mention the Gandhian view on Environmental degradation

3.5 ECOLOGICAL MARXISTS

The second trend is just opposite of the first trend, which we have discussed above.As we know that Marxists see the problems in political and economic terms, arguing that it is unequal access to resources, rather than the questions of values, which better explains the patterns and process of environmental degradation in India. In this stratified society, the rich destroy nature in the pursuit of profit, while the poor do so simply to survive. For Ecological Marxists, therefore the creation of an economically just society is a logical precondition of social and ecological harmony. In their practical emphasis, socialist activists concentrate on organizing the poor for collective action, working towards their larger goal of the distribution of economic and political power (Gadgil and Guha: 1995). Ecological Marxists are most closely identified with People's Science Movement, whose initial concern with taking 'science to the people' has been widened to include environmental protection.

3.6 ECOFEMINISM

Ecofeminism can be defined and described in many ways. According to Besthornand McMillen (2002), the term was coined in the seventies by the French author Francoise d'Eaubonne. For d'Eaubonne the term was meant to describe how the human race could be saved by women initiating an ecological revolutionas a way to counter the oppression of women that is one and the same as the oppression and destruction of nature. Phrased like this, ecofeminism is ecological because the preservation ofecosystems is a prime objective, and feminist because it offers up ways torecognize and counter male favoritism.

Ecofeminism as a school emerged in the West as a product of the peace, feminist and ecology movements of the late 1970s and the early 1980s. It has been already mentioned that the The term"Ecofeminism" was coined by the French writer Francoise d'Eaubonne in 1974. Itwas further developed by Ynestra King in about 1976 and became a movement in1980, with the organization, in the same year, of the first ecofeminist conference -

"Women and Life on Earth: Ecofeminism in the 80s", at Amherst, Massachusetts,US (Spretnak 1990).

According to ecofeminist Ynestra King: "Ecofeminism is about connectedness and wholeness of theory and practice (it sees) the devastation of the earth and her beings by the corporate warriors, and the threat of nuclear annihilation by the military warriors as feminist concerns. It is the same masculinist mentality which would deny us our right to our own bodies and our own sexuality and which depends on multiple systems of dominance and state power to have its way"(King 1983).

Whenever women protested against ecological destruction, threat of atomic destruction of life on earth, new developments in biotechnology, genetic engineering and reproductive technology, they discovered the connections between patriarchal domination and violence against women, the colonized non-western,non-White peoples and nature. It led to the realization that the liberation of women cannot be achieved in isolation from the larger struggle for preserving nature andlife on this earth.

Ecofeminism is based on certain fundamental claims that point to the existence of important connections between the oppression of women and oppression of nature. It is essential to understand the nature of these connections in order to understand the oppression of women and nature, and finally, every feminist theory must include an ecological perspective and vice versa (Warren 1987).

Ecofeminism can be defined as a "value system, a social movement, and apractice… (which) also offers a political analysis that explores the links between androcentrism and environmental destruction. It is an "awareness" that begins with the realization that the exploitation of nature is intimately linked to Western Man's attitude toward women and tribal cultures.

Some feminist scholars like Carolyn Merchant (1992) have categorized ecofeminist theory into liberal, radical or socialist frameworks. For the ecofeminists of the liberal mode (as for liberal feminists in general),environmental problems are a result of the rapid exploitation of natural resources accompanied by the lack of regulation of pesticides and

other environmental pollutants. This can be overcome by a social production that is environmentally sound. For this, one requires better science, conservation and laws. With equal educational opportunities, women can become scientists, natural resource conservators, lawyers, and so on like men. Thus, these ecofeminists attempt to change human relations with nature through the passage of new laws and regulations.

Ecofeminists with a radical bent analyzed environmental problems from within their critique of patriarchy and offered alternatives that could liberate both women and nature (Merchant 1990, p. 93).This perspective draws from the now famous article by Sherry Ortner, Is Female toMale as Nature is to Culture? (1974). The ecofeminists celebrate the relationship between women and nature through the popularization of ancient rituals centered on the Mother Goddess, the moon, animals and the female reproductive system. This prehistoric era, centered on goddess worship, was dethroned by an emerging patriarchal culture with male gods to whom the female deities were subservient. Nature was further degraded by the Scientific Revolution of the 17th century, that replaced the nurturing earth with the "metaphor of a machine to be controlled and repaired from outside...The earth is to be dominated by male developed and controlled technology, science and industry"(Merchant 1992, p. 191).

3.7 ANTHROPOCENTRISM

Anthropocentrism , in its original connotation in environmental ethics, is the belief that value is human-centered and that all other beings are means to human ends. Environmentally concerned authors have argued that anthropocentrism is ethically wrong and is at the root of ecological crisis. Since the early days of environmental ethics there has been discussion and debate about whether values in nature are anthropocentric (human centered) or ecocentric (non-human cenrered). Many have argued that anthropocentrism is inevitable and even benevolent for the aim of environmental protection. On the other hand the other group argues that anthropocentrism is inadequate for biodiversity conservation.

Let us begin our discussion with the definition of Anthropocentrism. According to Oxford English Dictionary Anthropocentrism is "regarding humankind as the central or most important element of existence". Human chauvinism is one aspect of anthropocentrism, not a new definition. One can either accept that other species and life processes have moral value (ecocentrism) or not (anthropocentrism). Anthropocentrism is a vague and perhaps in some ways misused term, meaning literally just human-centeredness,in common usage it refers to human centered values. As such, things can be human-centered in all sorts of ways. It is common in environmental ethics, biological conservation, and social science circles to conflate various meanings.

Author like Hayward says anthropocentrism means two things. First in discussing changing human actions, he is essentially advocating centering our efforts on humans, which is centrally a kind of anthropocentrism. Second he is promoting an ethics that does not include only human beings. It is important not to commit the fallacy of false equivalence by confusing the two.

John Passamore in 1974 in his book Man's responsibility of nature establishes himself as an early and prominent anthropocentric environmental ethicist. He dismisses claims that it would be intrinsically wrong to destroy a species, cut down a tree, clear wilderness" as merely ridiculous. Passamore's view define narrow anthropocentrism, which is characterized by an embrace of traditional human-centered ethics that isolate human from environment. Narrow anthropocentrism believes human alone posses value, human effort on behalf of non-human nature are driven by a desire to serve human needs.

Anthropocentrism as an ideology is egotistical and solipsistic, obsessed only with humans. Yet humans actually do love animals, trees, rivers and landscape and many indigenous cultures attributed values and respect to them. Anthropocentrism is clearly a significant driver of ecocide and environmental crisis, for society has been madly pursuing project 'human planet'without considering that humanity is fully dependent on nature. According to many environmental scientists, Anthropocentrism cannot lead

us to a sustainable future. Ecocentrism in contrast accepts that we are part of nature, and have a responsibility to respect the web of life and heal the damage caused by the ideological dominance of anthropocentrism.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q5: What is meant by ecofeminism?

Q6: Define anthropocentrism.

3.8 NEW ECOLOGICAL PARADIGM (NEP)

In the 1970s, scholars began recognizing the limits of what would be termed the Human Exceptionalism paradigm (HEP).The HEP captures the notion that humans, because of our exceptional characteristics relative to other species, were seen as being "exempt" from ecological constraints.In contrast they argued that within at least some work in environmental sociology one could discern an alternative paradigm or set of background assumptions. Dunlap etal (2002) mentions that by calling attention to the relevance of the physical environment and constraints that a finite planet poses for our species, the New Ecological Paradigm (NEP) offers a sharply contrasting image of human societies relative to that provided by the HEP. The HEP leads to a view of the environment as something to be controlled by human beings for their own ends, and of humans as having the ability to exert such control. It is certainly a stance traditionally taken by enginners whose role is to transform nature through the applications of science.

In contrast to the HEP, Catton and Dunlap's "new environmental paradigm" or 'new ecological paradigm" suggested a new perspective that took environmental variables into full account. They coined the New Ecological Paradigm, with assumptions contrary to HEP. The NEP leads adherents to view natural environment as an essential context of human social life, to see such environment as potentially fragile and limited in resources and also exercising constraints on the realization of human objectives. However, there is no doubt that whilethe NEP recognizes the innovative capacity of

humans, it also says humans are still ecologically interdependent as with other species. The NEP notes the power of social and cultural forces but does not profess social determinism. Instead, humans are impacted by the cause, effect, and feedback loops of ecosystems. The Earth has a finite level of natural resources and waste repositories. The NEP assumptions represents an argument that the fundamental features of human species is its biological relationship with nature.

The HEP/ NEP schema of Catton and Dunlop has had a curious influence on environmental sociology. On one hand their work has been widely read and often cited , especially on theoretical oriented papers, and is the point of departure for most important recent works in environmental sociology. In particular Catton and Dunlap's argument on the anthropocentric /unecological legacy of the classical sociological tradition is widely acknowledged by observers from a variety of theoretical stripes. On the other hand there has yet been relatively little fleshing out of board paradigmatic axioms of the NEP into more precise theoretical statements and hypotheses.

The other major application of the NEP in empirical sociological research has been in sample survey studies. In these studies the NEP is constructed not as set of domain assumptions that guide sociological inquiry, but rather as a set of cognitive beliefs held by segments of the public at large. The object of this research has been to develop empirical attitudinal indexes of the NEP and HEP and to examine the correlates of these beliefs and changes in beliefs.

The more that environmental sociologists and the world learn about current environmental conditions, the more the shift in stance towards the NEP. According to Dunlap and his colleagues yet the policy makers are endorsing the NEP. According to Olsen etal (1992) the resulting conflicts in perspectives provide a rich topic for sociological research



3.9 LET US SUM UP

- Environmentalism denominates a social movement that seeks to influence the political process by lobbying, activism, and education in order to protect natural resources and ecosystems.
- The three major classical sociological pioneers Emile Durkheim, Karl Marx and Max Weber had an implicit environmental dimension to their work which had never been bought to the fore.
- Marx used the concept of metabolism to describe the complex interaction between society and nature. He observed that metabolism constitutes the fundamental basis on which life is sustained and growth and reproduction become possible.
- The first strand in environmental movement which emphasizes the moral imperative of checking overuse and doing justice to the poor is called 'crusading Gandhian'. Environmental degradation is viewed above all as a moral problem, its origins lying in the wider acceptance of the ideology of materialism and consumerism. Because both of these ideologies draw human beings away from nature and encourage wasteful lifestyles.
- For Ecological Marxists, the creation of an economically just society is a logical precondition of social and ecological harmony.
- According to Besthorn and McMillen (2002), the term ecofeminism was coined in the seventies by the French author Francoise d'Eaubonne.
- For d'Eaubonne the term was meant to describe how the human race could be saved by women initiating an ecological revolution as a way to counter the oppression of women that is one and the same as the oppression and destruction of nature.
- Ecofeminism as a school emerged in the West as a product of the peace, feminist and ecology movements of the late 1970s and the early 1980s.

- Ecofeminism is based on certain fundamental claims that point to the existence of important connections between the oppression of women and oppression of nature.
- Ecofeminism can be defined as a "value system, a social movement, and a practice… (which) also offers a political analysis that explores the links between androcentrism and environmental destruction.
- Ecofeminists with a radical bent analyzed environmental problems from within their critique of patriarchy and offered alternatives that could liberate both women and nature (Merchant 1990, p.
- Anthropocentrism , in its original connotation in environmental ethics, is the belief that value is human-centred and that all other beings are means to human ends.
- Environmentally concerned authors have argued that anthropocentrism is ethically wrong and is at the root of ecological crisis.
- The HEP captures the notion that humans because of our exceptional characteristics relative to other species, were seen as being "exempt" from ecological constraints.
- The HEP leads to a view of the environment as something to be controlled by human beings for their own ends, and of humans as having the ability to exert such control. It is certainly a stance traditionally taken by engineers whose role is to transform nature through the applications of science.
- The NEP leads adherents to view natural environments as an essential context of human social life, to see such environment as potentially fragile and limited in resources and also exercising constraints on the realization of human objectives.



3.10 FURTHER READING

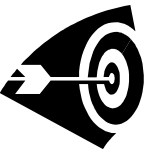
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3.11 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: Environmentalism denotes a social movement that seeks to influence the political process by lobbying, activism, and education in order to protect natural resources and ecosystems. Environmentalism as a movement covers broad areas of institutional oppression. Examples of these oppressions are: consumption of ecosystems and natural resources into waste, dumping waste into disadvantaged communities, air pollution, water pollution, weak infrastructure, exposure of organic life to toxins, mono culture, anti-polythene drive (jhola movement) and various other focuses.

Ans to Q No 2: Karl Marx , Max Weber and Emile Durkheim.

Ans to Q No 3: Marx used the concept of metabolism to describe the complex interaction between society and nature. He observed that metabolism constitutes the fundamental basis on which life is

sustained and growth and reproduction become possible. But by 1860s, this organic relationship was being seriously undercut by the practices of capitalist agriculture. Because landowners became profit oriented and they used the land to the possible extent and the use of fertilizer, pesticides etc. Landowners were accused of spoiling the natural fertility of the soil. This is of course, is exactly still occurring where monoculture prevails (monoculture is cultivation of single variety of crop for commercial purpose).Marx describes this as metabolic rift- the estrangement of human being from the natural world of the soil.

Ans to Q No 4: The perspective on environmentalism, which emphasizes the moral imperative of checking overuse and doing justice to the poor is called 'crusading Gandhian'. It actually relies heavily on moral/ religious viewpoint in its rejection of modern way of life. Environmental degradation is viewed above all as a moral problem, its origins lying in the wider acceptance of the ideology of materialism and consumerism.

Ans to Q No 5: Ecofeminism can be defined as a "value system, a social movement, and a practice… (which) also offers a political analysis that explores the links between androcentrism and environmental destruction. It is an "awareness" that begins with the realization that the exploitation of nature is intimately linked to Western Man's attitude toward women and tribal cultures.

Ans to Q No 6: Anthropocentrism , in its original connotation in environmental ethics, is the belief that value is human-centred and that all other beings are means to human ends.



3.12 MODEL QUESTIONS

Short Questions (Answer each question in about 150 words)

Q 1: Write a brief note on Ecological Marxists.

Q 2: Distinguish between HEP and NEP.

Long Questions ((Answer each question in about 300-500 words)

Q1: Write a note on major strands in Indian Environmentalism.

Q2: Evaluate the works of Karl Marx in understanding the relationship between environment and society.

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