UNIT 13: ECOLOGICAL ETHICS: VEDIC, JAINA AND BAUDDHA VIEWS

UNIT STRUCTURE

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13.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you will be able to:

- Explain what is environmental/ecological ethics
- Understand the need for extending ethics to the domain of the non human world
- Understand how the basic tenets of certain major religions of the world can inspire environmental awareness
- Examine the Hindu views on nature and environment.
- Examine the teachings of Jainism and Buddhism in light of the contemporary environmental problems.

13.2 INTRODUCTION

The serious environmental concerns that face us today lead to the growing realization that our current mode of life as humans on this planet is not sustainable. We look to science and technology for solutions.

Biologists, earth scientists, and meteorologists offer us increasingly technical solutions to our problems. But is there, perhaps, a role for philosophy to play in responding to our current problems? Out of such concerns the field of environmental/ecological ethics developed in the late 1960s, incorporating a variety of philosophical issues concerning the human relation to the natural environment. It sought to reinvestigate the centuries-old disciplines of ontology, epistemology and ethics, in the light of the potentially disastrous ecological problems of modern society.

Although ethics is concerned with human to human relation, environmental ethics sought to extend the traditional boundaries of ethics from solely including humans to including the non-human world. Thus, environmental ethics is the discipline in philosophy that studies the moral relationship of human beings to, and also the value and moral status of, the environment and its nonhuman contents.

Originally formulated as a branch of applied ethics, its scope has expanded to include not just 'environmental ethics', but also issues of an aesthetic and theological character. Themes of atomism, human-centeredness, and the scope of what is intrinsically valuable set much of the agenda for further theorizing. Early 'environmental ethics' explored the extent to which existing ethical theories could be expanded to include the natural environment; it also proposed new ethical formulations that to varying degrees challenged the boundaries of then current moral philosophy.

In the literature on environmental ethics the distinction between instrumental value and intrinsic value has been of considerable importance. The former is the value of things as means to further some other ends, whereas the latter is the value of things as ends in themselves regardless of whether they are also useful as means to other ends. For example, a certain wild plant may have instrumental value because it provides the ingredients for some medicine or as an aesthetic object for human observers. But if the plant also has some value in itself independently of its prospects for furthering some other ends such as human health, or the pleasure from aesthetic experience, then the plant

also has intrinsic value. Because the intrinsically valuable is that which is good as an end in itself, it is commonly agreed that something's possession of intrinsic value generates a direct moral duty on the part of moral agents to protect it or at least refrain from damaging it.

The traditional western ethical perspectives, however, are anthropocentric or human-centered in that either they assign intrinsic value to human beings alone or they assign a significantly greater amount of intrinsic value to human beings than to any nonhuman things such that the protection or promotion of human interests or well-being at the expense of nonhuman things turns out to be nearly always justified . Aristotle stated that "nature has made all things specifically for the sake of man" and that the value of nonhuman things in nature is merely instrumental. Generally, anthropocentric positions find it problematic to articulate what is wrong with the cruel treatment of nonhuman animals, except to the extent that such treatment may lead to bad consequences for human beings.

When environmental ethics emerged as a new sub-discipline of philosophy in the early 1970s, it did so by posing a challenge to traditional anthropocentrism. In the first place, it questioned the assumed moral superiority of human beings to members of other species on earth. In the second place, it investigated the possibility of rational arguments for assigning intrinsic value to the natural environment and its nonhuman contents. Alongside the new environmental ethics the field of environmental theology also started to develop.



LET US KNOW

The academic field of environmental ethics grew up in response to the works of Rachel Carson and Murray Bookchin and events such as the first Earth Day in 1970, when environmentalists started urging philosophers to consider the philosophical aspects of environmental problems. Two papers published in the journal *Science* had a crucial impact: Lynn

White's "The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis (March 1967) and Garrett Hardin's "The Tragedy of the Commons" (December 1968). Another influential work was an essay by Aldo Leopold in his work "A Sand County Almanac" called "The Land Ethic" in which Leopold explicitly claimed that the roots of the ecological crisis were philosophical.

13.3 RELIGION AND WORLDVIEWS

In 1967 Lynn White Jr., a historian from the University of California at Los Angeles, claimed was that the environmental crisis is fundamentally a spiritual and religious crisis, and that its ultimate solution would itself have to be spiritual and religious.

Although environmental ethics as an academic discipline developed mostly in the West, one can find environmentally relevant insights from the great ancient traditions of the East like the Vedic age, Jainisn and Buddhism. All the three traditions concern themselves with making sense of the human condition. For Hinduism, adherence to one's dharma (duty), observance of ritual, and prayerful reflection and meditation constitute the good life. Buddhists seek to understand the root causes of human suffering and to follow an eightfold path of ethical behavior and meditation. Jainism emphasizes the role of ethics in advancing along a fourteenfold path toward total liberation. All three traditions include detailed assessments of karma, and make clear that action (karma) taken in the present will leave a residue or seed (samskara, vasana, bija) that will bear fruit (phala) at some future time. Consequently, ethics must be assiduously observed to assure a propitious outcome to human endeavors.

13.4 THE VEDIC VIEWS ON ECOLOGICAL ETHICS:

The Hindu attitude towards nature is shaped by the religion's view of the cosmos and creation. The relationship between human beings and nature attracted the seers of the Vedic Period. They contemplated over

the mysteries of the creation, the place of heaven and earth and even beyond. They were curious about the mystery of creation and the establishment of this universe. Through their deep thinking, guesses and postulations they came to acknowledge that the material causes of this creation happened to be the Panch Mahabhutas (Five Great Elements): Earth/Prithvi, air/Vayu, space/Akash, water/Apah, fire/ Agni.

These five Mahabhutas are cosmic elements which create, nurture, and sustain all forms of life and after death, or decay they absorb what was created earlier. Thus, they play an important role in preserving and sustaining the environment. From its very early beginnings , the Indian Vedic tradition has placed lot of importance on the 'good' values such as happiness, survival, courage, health, joy, calmness, friendship, knowledge and truth; and on the side of 'bad' their opposite, notably, misery, suffering, sickness and injury, death, infertility, pain, anger, enmity, ignorance or error, untruth. These normative values were not restricted for human well-being alone, rather they were universalized for all sentient beings and inanimate sectors as well: spirit spheres, i.e. gods and the faithfully departed; the biosphere, i.e. animals and plants; and the broader biotic universe, i.e. inanimate realms comprising the elements,



LET US KNOW

Even before the Brahmanical order took firm root in greater India, there are records from incomplete archaeological findings, that suggest a major civilization of the Indus Valley (in a sprawling region encompassed by the Punjab, Sind, and present-day Pakistan and Baluchistan), which peaked around 3000 BCE, where a close symbiosis between nature and the Dravidic people appears to have been prevalent. The major cities of the Indus civilization, namely, Harappa and Mohenjodaro, with their mudbrick and timber dwellings complete with baths, extensive drainage and sewer systems, give the impression of being exceedingly carefully

designed. The architecture as well as farming practices gave evidence to structural harmony with surrounding and climatic conditions that would optimally conserve natural resources, prevent deforestation, and also appease the gods who were little more than personified symbols of human dependence upon the energies of nature. Barely decipherable inscriptions and artifacts bear testimony to the strong worship of a form of feminine earth divinity and of Siva, an ascetic yogic god. Some elements of the religious and cultural practices from the Indus period and other indigenous (especially aboriginal) communities continued into the subsequent Vedic phase, which began with an influx of Aryans or 'Noble People', a tribe of pastoral nomads from somewhere in Central Asia who settled on the plains of the Ganges in the northern part of the subcontinent around second millennium BCE. Their agrarian culture, so much dependent on the forces of nature, is reflected in the repertory of hymns, the earliest of which are known as Rig Veda. The oral tradition and the Veda would have to be among the earliest record of ruminations on nature in India. The Vedas (from Sanskrit veda, 'what is known') gradually grew into a huge canonical body of recited and memorized 'texts' that both eulogized and appeased the forces of nature

Hinduism has an impressive literary history, and, although it is not a text-oriented religion, its textual history provides a convenient framework for understanding the significance of nature in the tradition. The earliest literary source of Hinduism, the Rig-Veda, contains hymns of praise and adoration to a number of the phenomena of nature depicted as deities. Indra is the seasonal monsoon rain, pictured as a colossal male figure destroying the demon that withholds the waters from the thirsty land. Surya is the sun, the Maruts are the storm spirits, and Apas is the waters. Prithivi the Earth is praised as the mother who sustains the world and all that dwells upon her.

The Rig-Veda and other ancient Vedic (or wisdom) collections lavish praise on such rivers as the Yamuna, the Saraswati, the Indus, and the Ganges. The Hindu tradition regards all rivers as sacred. Along the banks of rivers across India, ancient temples and contemporary religious practices express deep piety toward rivers as Mother, the source of life, the deity who cleanses defilement and sin. Vedic sources also portray the universe as a living organism in which every part is related to the life of the whole. Vedic literature develops the view that all of life is sacred because all living beings reflect the one divine reality from which all of life has come; it therefore prohibits injury to living things.

In the Upanishads, which are philosophical supplements to the Vedic hymns, (composed c. 800–600 B.C.E.), the attitude of adoration toward the natural world is retained. But the Upanishads are a diverse body of documents. The teachings of the Upanishads range over such topics as the ultimate ground and source of the visible world, the nature of the true self that resides in the depths of the human person and in other living creatures, the condition of the embodied self in the visible world, and the path that leads to the liberation of the self from its bondage to otherwise endless rebirths in the visible world called samsara. Here, alongside the attitude of adoration of nature, we find a disposition toward nature less consistent with the Rig-Veda and other Vedic collections. Despite the variety of insights of the Upanishads, their attitude toward the natural world can be gathered together in terms of two diverging tendencies. On the one hand, the natural world and all that it contains is, or is the manifestation of, Brahman, the ultimate reality. Other passages emphasize that, although the supreme self is the essence all things, it is also other than anything that can be seen or conceived of. In some of the Upanishads, this reality is to be sought by means of penetration into the depths of the inner self.

Although the Upanishads do not all agree upon a single method for the pursuit of this ultimate reality, many recommend renunciation of the material world, which is seen as a provisional and transitory reality. For this reason, some of the Upanishads tend to minimize the importance of

the material world and the physical body in which the embodied soul is condemned to repeated lives.

By the second century C.E., the Hindu tradition had begun to mediate between these opposing tendencies by articulating not one but four ends or purposes to human existence (catush purushartha): namely, Dharma, Atha, Kama, Moksha.

Around the same period the tradition came to understand earthly life as laid out in terms of four stages namely, brahmacarya, grihastha, vanaprastha, sannyasin.

Because the four ends of life are relevant to the different stages of life, the tradition emphasizes both the importance of the material world, including the dharmas—which are relevant to the maintenance of the natural, social, and political order—and the final goal of liberation. The four ends and the four stages of life reflect the influence of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata (composed c. 500–100 B.C.E.), the two most extensive works in Indian literary history. These epics tell stories of the response of idealized characters to challenges that illustrate and provide a context for reflection upon fundamental dharmas, or values, concerning both the temporal world and the aim of human life. Both epics tell of an extended exile in the forest in which much of the action is set. Although the forest evokes fear, it is also admired for its fecundity and beauty. In the forest the characters rise to challenges and encounter the divine. Critical events in these narratives occur in forest locations that are still sites of religious pilgrimage. Thus, in the grand narratives of the tradition, the landscape of India has an integral significance.

In a critical episode in the Mahabharata called the Bhagavad-Gita (Song of the Blessed One), Krishna appears as the Supreme Lord of the universe and instructs Arjuna, one of the five central characters of the story, about the critical moral and religious teachings of the tradition: the importance of engagement with the world in an attitude of renunciation and the importance of devotion to God in any of his manifold forms. In this important work, Lord Krishna supports the religious significance of the natural world, proclaiming himself to be the taste in the waters, the

light of the sun and moon, the pure fragrance in earth, brightness in fire, and the life in all beings (Bhagavad-Gita 7: 8–9).The importance of the natural world is further reflected in the Puranas (Ancient Stories, composed c. 300–900 C.E.). The Bhagavata-Purana (also called the Shrimad Bhagavata) tells the story of the birth of Lord Krishna and his childhood in the forests of Vrindavan on the banks of the Yamuna River, now greatly polluted with sewage from the city of Delhi. His teachings are set in these forests, for which he expresses admiration and love.

This Purana tells of a colossal venomous serpent that encroached upon the Yamuna and poisoned its waters. The alarmed Krishna dived into the poisoned waters and, after an enormous struggle, prevailed against the serpent and danced on its many heads. For those engaged in the ecological restoration of the waters and land of Vrindavan, Krishna is an inspiration and symbol of hope. In the Matsya-Purana, the goddess Parvati plants an Ashoka tree and cares for it. As it prospers, other deities and the sages question her attention to this tree. Parvati replies that a person who digs a well in a place where water is scarce lives in heaven for as many years as there are drops of water in the well. She states that a large reservoir is worth ten wells, that a son is the equal of ten reservoirs, and that a single tree is the equal of ten sons. In many of the Puranas, animals are the vahanas, or vehicles, and therefore the symbols of the gods. They are featured in narratives both in the Puranas and the epics: the bull is the vahana of Lord Shiva, the cow is the vahana of Lord Krishna, the elephant of Indra, the lion of Parvati.

Often a particular animal has religious meaning because of its role in the religious narrative. The monkey is the living representation of Hanuman, the monkey God who, in the Ramayana, assisted Lord Rama when the demon Ravana abducted his wife, the goddess Sita. These animals appear prominently in contemporary religious life.

It is perhaps in the Shastras, or writings concerning dharma (duty) and artha (prosperity) that the most explicit injunctions toward the protection of nature can be found. In the Arthashastra (c. 300 B.C.E.), fines are recommended for offenses such as disposing of dust on roads;

urinating or defecating near a well, pond, or temple; and for inappropriately disposing of a dead animal. Its concern for forest resources is expressed in its sanctions against the destruction of trees, groves, and forests. For the cutting of the tender sprouts of fruit trees, flowering trees, or shade trees in parks near a city, it recommends a fine of 6 panas. For the minor branches of such trees, the fine is 12, and for the large branches of such trees it is 24. For the cutting of the trunk of such trees the fine is 48–96, and for the felling of such trees the fine is 200–500 panas. For trees that mark boundaries or are worshipped, the sanctions are doubled. Although it is impossible to know the ancient value of the pana, it is significant that damage to forest resources were taken seriously enough that a fine should have been imposed. The fact that the fines increase geometrically with the size of the damaged branches suggest that trees were objects of value. The imposition of especially severe penalties for damaging a tree that has religious significance indicates not only that trees were objects of worship but also that the provisions of law supported the worship of trees. Widely considered the most authoritative of the ancient Dharmashastras, the Laws of Manu (c. 100 B.C.E.) states that anything that contains blood or poison—or impure objects such as urine, feces, spit—is never to be disposed of in water.

Interest in the environmental values of Hinduism emerged in the 1960s amid claims by some environmentalists that because the Judeo-Christian tradition held the idea of God as a being outside of nature who created humans as uniquely endowed with a soul, and who placed them in charge of nature to use it as they pleased, this tradition was largely responsible for the present ecological crisis. Because these thinkers saw the traditions of Asia as different from those of the Judeo-Christian tradition, Hinduism came to be explored for the insight it might offer toward the development of a viable environmental ethic.

For some, Hinduism presented a view of nature in which every mountain, rock, and tree was to be respected, venerated, and

presumably protected. For others Hinduism was hopelessly occupied with liberation from the material world and therefore irrelevant to environmental concerns. Environmental writing since the 1980s has tried less to infer a single disposition of Hinduism toward the environment than to understand such issues as the environmental significance of particular texts and practices, the impact of environmental degradation upon Hindu worship, and the ways in which particular Hindu ideas and practices have supported local environmental initiatives. The history of India reveals differing views of nature developed over an enormous span of time. Many Hindu traditions have supported strategies of resource use that have helped sustain India's biological diversity and have supported communities that depend on it.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What is the purpose behind the development of the discipline of environmental ethics?

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Q 2: What is the difference between instrumental value and intrinsic value?

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Q 3: What attracted the seers of the Vedic period?

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Q 4: What are the five great elements?

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Q 5: Name some major works that inspired the development of environmental philosophy?

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13.5 JAINISM AND BUDDHISM

Jainism and Buddhism arise from ancient India and share several basic features. Both emphasize ascetisicm and may be characterized as renouncer traditions. Unlike Hinduism, they do look to the vedic texts as sources of religious inspiration, but owe their origins to human teachers. Jainism is the older of the two traditions, looking to the teachings of 24 spiritual leaders known as Tirthankaras.

On the other hand, Buddhism originated with the life and teachings of the Buddha (Siddhartha Gautama) who probably lived in the 5th or 4th century BCE. Until the past decade, when thousands of Jainas migrated to Great Britain and North America, Jainism was found nearly exclusively in India. The largest concentration of Jainas today resides in the northwest Indian states of Maharashtra, Gujarat and Rajasthan. For the past few decades sufficient numbers of Americans have practiced Buddhism of various types for an American form of Buddhism to emerge.

Buddhism spread from India throughout the rest of Asia. Theravada Buddhism continues to be the majority religion in Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos and Thailand. Mahayana Buddhism is practiced in China, Korea, Japan, and Vietnam. Vajrayana Buddhism (Tantra) is prevalent within the Tibetan religious community.

13.6 JAINA VIEWS ON ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

Jainism owes its name to the term jina, meaning one who conquers attachment and overcomes pain. The prominent Jina who helped give a more formal shape to the order and systemized the teachings of an older group of Jinas was Mahavira (circa 500 BCE), possibly a contemporary of the Buddha.

Jainism, which originated prior to 500 BCE in northeastern India, supports key ideas and practices that accord well with environmental ethics. Its cosmology states that soul (jiva) is found even in plants and the elements, and its rules of behavior advocate avoiding harm to all beings.

Jainas abstain from participating in specific occupations that kill or injure animals. Consequently, Jainas will not participate in butchery, livestock rearing, or agricultural practices that abuse animals. This concern results in the shunning of perhaps less obvious forms of violence as well: dealing in charcoal, selling timber, driving oxcarts, dealing in ivory, manufacturing or selling alcohol, dealing in poisons or weapons, burning fields, draining water, breeding destructive animals. Its leaders have advocated personal and societal life patterns that protect life in its myriad forms. The oldest extant Jain text, the Acaranga Sutra (ca. 300 BCE), proclaims that ‘‘a wise person should not act sinfully towards the earth, nor cause others to act so, nor allow others to act so’’ , that one ‘‘should not kill, nor cause others to kill, nor consent to the killing of others’’ , and that ‘‘all breathing, existing, living, sentient beings should not be slain, nor treated with violence, nor abused, nor tormented, nor driven away. This is the pure, unchangeable, eternal law. These passages outline the fundamental rule to be obeyed by all Jains: the observance of nonviolence (ahimsa). This exhortation extends not merely to behavior toward other humans but, as noted, also to behavior toward the earth itself, toward the elements (water, fire, and air), and toward plants and animals. This earliest text outlines several techniques for avoiding violence to living beings, including not wearing clothing produced in ways that unduly harm mobile living beings, such as fur or silk garments; not consuming meat, fish, or eggs; and not moving about excessively during the rainy season (this last practice helps one to avoid stepping on the many insects that proliferate when it rains). Jain literature and philosophy parallels that of the other two great ancient traditions: Brahmanic Hinduism and Buddhism.

The basic philosophic belief of the Jainas is that every entity in the world possesses jiva or a sentient principle, and there is a countless number of jivas, whose distinguishing feature is consciousness along with vital energy and a pleasurable disposition. The suggestion is that consciousness is continuous and nothing in the universe is without some degree of sentience at varying levels of conscious and apparently

unconscious existence, from its more developed form in adult human beings to invisible embryonic modes at 'lower' animal and plant levels. The sentient principle jiva subsists in a contingent relation to the quantity of karma it has accumulated through its activity, volitional and non-volitional. If karma can be prevented and exhausted the bondage of cyclic process of existence can be arrested, and the sentient being would achieve full self-realization. Since this requires much discipline (of self-control and renunciation) and the process is long and arduous (extending over several embodiments and re-deaths), each sentient being has to act in accordance within its relative level of bondage and limited freedom. The Jinas remain the sagely exemplars, while 'lesser' sentient beings, at least in terms of practical ethics, are considered immune from moral frailty, though they are not devoid of moral value in their own right by this theory. The cardinal disciplinary codes highlighted in Jaina practical ethics are: ahimsa or non-injury, satya or truthfulness, asteya or not stealing, brahmacharya or sexual restraint, apigraha or nonpossession.

The 24 great teachers of Tirthankaras have urged the followers to cast off the shackles of Karma in search of spiritual perfection(Kevala). The Jaina sutras outlines detailed practices for observance of non-violence (ahimsa). By perfecting non-violent behavior, the Jaina practitioner cleanses one's life force or soul (jiva) and rids it of all traces of karma.

Jainas have developed a profound ethical awareness and conscience in their worldview, which sees life forms as passing through a cycle of birth after birth and regards every human being as having spent time as an almost unimaginable array of other life forms, including animals and bacteria (referred to by Jains as nigoda). Knowing that they were once sheep or goats or cows, they take special care to protect all animals. Even kindling fire becomes problematic for observant Jains, on account of the physical pain created by the friction of generating a flame. Jain monks and nuns never light or extinguish lamps or cook food. Lay Jains often avoid over using electricity, with some families eschewing air conditioning not for lack of wealth but out of concern not to steal from

other life forms for the sake of one's own physical comfort. Jainas adhere to nonviolence to purify their own souls. They preach self-restraint and caution around nature. If one harms a being, that harm will return to hurt oneself. Jain literature, such as the story of Yashodhara, does not celebrate the beauty of plants and animals, but rather serves as a cautionary tale, warning its reader not to succumb to the violence and lust that runs rampant in nature. Various Jainas in the past several decades have taken leadership roles in calling attention to problems of pollution and environmental degradation. In 1949 Acarya Tulsi, a confidant and adviser to Mahatma Gandhi, promulgated a list of twelve vows, starting with a vow not to commit violence in any form, and ending with ''I will do my best to avoid contributing to pollution''. L. M. Singhvi, a member of Parliament who also served on India's Supreme Court, published The Jain Declaration on Nature, which lists the core teachings (nonviolence, interdependence, the doctrine of manifold aspects, equanimity, and compassion) that constitute the foundation for a Jain ecological ethics. He reiterates that in Jain cosmology, life pervades the world, appearing as ''earth-bodies, water-bodies, fire-bodies, airbodies, vegetable-bodies, and mobile bodies ranging from bacteria, insects, worms, birds and larger animals to human beings, infernal beings, and celestial beings.'' Singhvi asserts that by applying the five traditional vows and practicing kindness to animals, vegetarianism, avoidance of waste, and charity, one can find ''a viable route plan for humanity's common pilgrimage for holistic environmental protection, peace, and harmony''.

The traditional worldview developed by the Jaina community over the course of several centuries could not directly anticipate the environmental crises of the twenty first century. It does, however, provide conceptual resources that might be applied to specific problems as they arise. The complexity of environmental issues requires approaching each situation from a variety of perspectives. The Jain philosophy of many-sidedness (anekanta) can be instructive in this regard.

13.7 BAUDDHA'S VIEWS ON ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

The Buddha began his teachings with the fact that life is full of suffering. Thus, the appropriate moral response was to minimize suffering and pain as best as one can and to overcome suffering, both by understanding the causes of such existential and other ailments, and by alleviating the suffering of all forms of life. Buddhist ethic covers human behaviour in relation to all living beings and it underpins certain basic virtues like compassion, love, kindness, sympathy, empathy, equanimity and joy in the other's happiness. It is said that human beings are capable of infinite amount of compassion, generosity and gratitude, and that all creatures, great and small, should be the subject of our moral sensibility.

The Buddhist codes of ethics is similar to the Jaina ethics, with much emphasis placed on self-control, abstinence, patience, contentment, purity, truthfulness and right attitudes. The treatment of animals and plants in accordance with these principles finds ample references in Buddhist texts, from the earliest monastic codes to the development of Zen Buddhism in China, Korea and Japan. Nature as a whole is not looked upon as antithetical to human needs; rather, everything in nature is capable of making a contribution towards overcoming suffering and the final spiritual end which human beings strive toward. The Buddha's teachings include tales of acts of generosity on the part of animals towards human beings, and the reciprocal compassion which humans are advised to direct towards other life forms. Buddhist societies evolved with this moral self-consciousness, and the great emperor Asoka, after his conversion to Buddhism, institutionalized care and welfare towards animals. Buddhism, like all the renunciatory traditions of ancient India, such as Jainism and Yoga, made a great virtue of contentment. However, in line with the Buddha's teaching on the Middle Way, monks were not expected to renounce property

completely. Monastic discipline permitted some possessions, but they were to be used to the fullest extent and monks were enjoined to avoid all forms of luxury and wastefulness. Robes, for example, should be repaired repeatedly. Only when they deteriorated beyond a state in which they could be worn decorously could they be cut up and reused. The Buddha rejected the cultured surroundings of the settled life to live a peripatetic existence as a dweller in forests and other sparsely inhabited places. The defining event of his life, his enlightenment, took place while he was sitting underneath a forest tree. The arc of his life thus was from civilization to nature, and that existence became an enduring model for future generations of his followers. Although few ever attain the ideal, the notion of the wilderness, or forest-dwelling monk has deep roots in all parts of the tradition.

The centrality of the doctrine of dependent co-arising (pratityasamutpada) in Buddhist thought appears to provide powerful support for the modern conception of ecology. If there are no independent entities, the interdependence and interrelatedness of things are established. The doctrine of the gati reflects this by pointing to the radical kinship of all living beings. All people have circulated endlessly through the six destinies, and as the Buddha observed to his monks: ‘‘Bhikkhus, it is not easy to find a being who has not formerly been your mother, or your father, or your brother, your sister or your son or daughter’’ People’s behaviour toward other beings should be illuminated by this insight, and the idea was so pervasive that it became part of the ideal of Buddhist kingship in India. Buddha also taught to abstain from taking life. Yet unlike the Jainas, the Buddha adopted the Middle Path in his understanding of the important pan-Indian concept of non injury (ahimsa). For Jainism the ideal of ahimsa has absolute value, and because all living things, vegetables included, suffer by being consumed, the final goal of the Jain ascetic, although rarely achieved, is death by starvation. The Buddha regarded that as too extreme. His monks were allowed to eat in moderation, but their food had to be collected through begging. Almost

anything placed in the begging bowl had to be consumed. That included meat, assuming that the monk had not heard or seen the animal's slaughter or suspected that it had been killed on his behalf. Early Buddhist monks were not vegetarians. The Buddha also laid down rules that prevented the monastic order (sangha) from engaging in agricultural activity, for digging the soil inevitably leads to the death of many small creatures. In Indian Buddhism plants were assigned a lack of sentiency, and that meant they were not regarded as being caught up in the round of rebirth. Instead, the plant kingdom was seen as constituting part of the backdrop or scenery of samsara, and little thought was given to its significance. However, when Buddhism became established in China and other parts of eastern Asia, it underwent a series of transformations, some arguing for the attainment of buddhahood by nonsentient beings to be applied specifically to the vegetable kingdom. Monks must not damage plants and seeds intentionally during their wanderings, but these restrictions are not possible for the lay follower who must work the land to live. Although monks can follow the eightfold noble path to the ultimate goal of liberation fully, laypersons clearly are restricted by the manner of their livelihood. They can hope for rebirth in a more favorable gati, but it is unlikely that they will reach nirvana in this life. Nevertheless, monks need to be fed, and the layperson can cancel some of the demerit associated with his actions with the merit accrued by alms giving.

Another idea retained by popular Buddhism is that trees may be the residences of tree spirits and other minor spirits. For this reason pious Buddhists traditionally have been reluctant to cut down trees before ensuring that a rite is performed to encourage dwelling spirits to find a new home.

Also, the Buddha's enlightenment under the bodhi tree provides an interesting link with archaic rites connected with sacred trees. This complex of ideas and practices has been retained by Buddhists, who continue to venerate the many trees still in existence that is believed to have grown from cuttings of that original tree. It also has been reworked

as a means of engaging in environmental activism, particularly in Thailand, where the forces of modernization have contributed to massive destruction of forest cover.

13.8 CONCLUSION

After the colonization of India by the British, a philosophy that viewed nature largely in terms of its economic value for industry tended to marginalize the views of communities that expressed their dependence upon the environment in religious terms and that supported its protection.

With India's achievement of national independence in 1947, state forest departments became the largest landholders in the nation. Under pressure toward economic development, established forest industries supported continued exploitation of forest resources to the detriment of local communities. Unregulated industrial development contributed to further degradation of forests, waterways, and land. Environmental awareness began to emerge as conflicts over natural-resource use were played out against a background of increasing ecological degradation.

In this light some environmentalists believe that the Vedic, Jaina and Bauddha views for nature can help to spur an adequate response to the many environmental problems of India's increasingly urban and industrial economy.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.6 Fill in the blanks:

a) Environmental ethics studies the ..... relationship of human beings with the environment and its nonhuman contents.

b) The earliest literary source of Hinduism, the ....., contains hymns of praise and adoration of nature.

c) Environmental ethics emerged as a new sub-discipline of Ethics by posing a challenge to traditional.....

d) Buddhism originated with the life and teachings of.....

e) The basic philosophic belief of the Jainas is that every entity in the world possesses ..... or a sentient principle

Q.7. State whether the following statements are true or false:

a) Environmental ethics is based on the idea that our current mode of life as humans on this planet is sustainable. (T/F)

b) Environmental ethics is a branch of applied ethics. (T/F)

c) The traditional western ethical perspectives, are anthropocentric or human-centered (T/F)

d) Buddhist code of ethics is not similar to Jaina code of ethics. (T/F)



13.9 LET US SUM UP

- The serious environmental concerns that face us today lead to the growing realization that our current mode of life as humans on this planet is not sustainable.
- The field of environmental/ecological ethics developed in the late 1960s, incorporating a variety of philosophical issues concerning the human relation to the natural environment.
- In the literature on environmental ethics the distinction between instrumental value and intrinsic value has been of considerable importance.
- Although environmental ethics developed mostly in the west, one can find environmentally relevant insights from the great ancient traditions of the East like the Vedic age, Jainisn and Buddhism.
- The Hindu attitude towards nature is shaped by the religion's view of the cosmos and creation.
- Hinduism presented a view of nature in which every mountain, rock, and tree was to be respected, venerated, and presumably protected.

- Jainism, which originated prior to 500 BCE in northeastern India, supports key ideas and practices that accord well with environmental ethics.
- The Buddhist codes of ethics is similar to the Jaina ethics, with much emphasis placed on self-control, abstinence, patience, contentment, purity, truthfulness and right attitudes. The treatment of animals and plants in accordance with these principles finds ample references in Buddhist texts.



13.10 FURTHER READINGS

1. Jamieson, D. (2001). A Companion to Environmental Philosophy. USA: Blackwell
2. Callicot, J.B, Frodeman, R. (2009). Encyclopedia of Environmental Ethics and Philosophy. United States: Macmillan
3. Chapple, C. (2002). Jainism and Ecology: Non violence in the Web of Life. Cambridge: Harvard Divinity School.
4. Chapple, C. (2000). Hinduism and Ecology: The Intersection of Earth, Sky, and Water. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.



13.11 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans. To Q. No. 1: To extend the traditional boundaries of ethics from solely including humans to including the non-human world.

Ans. To Q. No. 2: Instrumental value is the value of things as means to further some other ends, whereas intrinsic value is the value of things as ends in themselves regardless of whether they are also useful as means to other ends.

Ans. To Q. No. 3: The relationship between human beings and nature attracted the seers of the Vedic Period.

Ans. To Q. No. 4: Earth/Prithvi, air/Vayu, space/Akash, water/Apah, fire/ Agni. These five Mahabhutas are cosmic elements which create,

nurture, and sustain all forms of life and after death, or decay they absorb what was created earlier. Thus, they play an important role in preserving and sustaining the environment.

Ans. To Q. No. 5: Silent Spring by Rachel Carson, Land Ethics by Aldo Leopold,The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis by Lynn White

Ans. To Q. No. 6: a) moral

b) Rg Veda

c) Anthropocentrism

d) Siddhartha Gautama

e) Jiva

Ans. To Q. No. 7: a) False

b) True

c) True

d) False



13.12 MODEL QUESTIONS

(a) Very short questions:

Q 1: Define environmental ethics?

Q 2: Who is Aldo Leopold?

Q 3: What is the basic philosophic belief of the Jainas?

Q 4: State the Buddhist code of ethics?

(b) Short questions: (answer in about 150-200 words)

Q 1: What is the need for an ethics of the environment?

Q 2: What are the core teachings of Jain ecological ethics?

Q 3: How the doctrine of dependent co-arising (pratityasamutpada) in Buddhist thought provides support for the modern conception of ecology.

Q 4: What are the similarities and differences between Jaina and Buddhist ethics?

(c) Long questions: (answer in about 300-500 words)

Q 1: Write an essay on the need and emergence of the academic discipline of environmental ethics.

Q 2: Discuss the environmental values that are found in the scriptures of the Vedic period. How are these values relevant for the contemporary debates in environmental ethics?

Q 3: Write a note on Jaina ethics and its relevance to an ethics of the environment.

Q 4: Write a note on Buddhism and Environmental Ethics.

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