

ENVIRONMENTAL PHILOSOPHY

COURSE CODE: M23PH02DE

Discipline Specific Elective Course
Postgraduate Programme in Philosophy
Self Learning Material



SREENARAYANAGURU
OPEN UNIVERSITY

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The State University for Education, Training and Research in Blended Format, Kerala

SREENARAYANAGURU OPEN UNIVERSITY

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To increase access of potential learners of all categories to higher education, research and training, and ensure equity through delivery of high quality processes and outcomes fostering inclusive educational empowerment for social advancement.

Mission

To be benchmarked as a model for conservation and dissemination of knowledge and skill on blended and virtual mode in education, training and research for normal, continuing, and adult learners.

Pathway

Access and Quality define Equity.

Environmental Philosophy

Course Code: M23PH02DE

Semester - III

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ENVIRONMENTAL PHILOSOPHY

Course Code: M23PH02DE

Semester- III

Discipline Specific Elective Course
Postgraduate Programme in Philosophy

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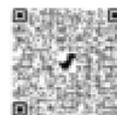
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MESSAGE FROM VICE CHANCELLOR

Dear learner,

I extend my heartfelt greetings and profound enthusiasm as I warmly welcome you to Sreenarayanaguru Open University. Established in September 2020 as a state-led endeavour to promote higher education through open and distance learning modes, our institution was shaped by the guiding principle that access and quality are the cornerstones of equity. We have firmly resolved to uphold the highest standards of education, setting the benchmark and charting the course.

The courses offered by the Sreenarayanaguru Open University aim to strike a quality balance, ensuring students are equipped for both personal growth and professional excellence. The University embraces the widely acclaimed “blended format,” a practical framework that harmoniously integrates Self-Learning Materials, Classroom Counseling, and Virtual modes, fostering a dynamic and enriching experience for both learners and instructors.

The University aims to offer you an engaging and thought-provoking educational journey. The postgraduate programme in Philosophy is designed to be a continuation of the undergraduate programme in Philosophy. It maintains a close connection with the content and teaching methods of the undergraduate programme. It advances the more nuanced aspects of philosophical theories and practices. The university has recognised that empirical methods have limitations when explaining philosophical concepts. As a result, they have made a deliberate effort to use illustrative methods throughout their content delivery. The Self-Learning Material has been meticulously crafted, incorporating relevant examples to facilitate better comprehension.

Rest assured, the university’s student support services will be at your disposal throughout your academic journey, readily available to address any concerns or grievances you may encounter. We encourage you to reach out to us freely regarding any matter about your academic programme. It is our sincere wish that you achieve the utmost success.

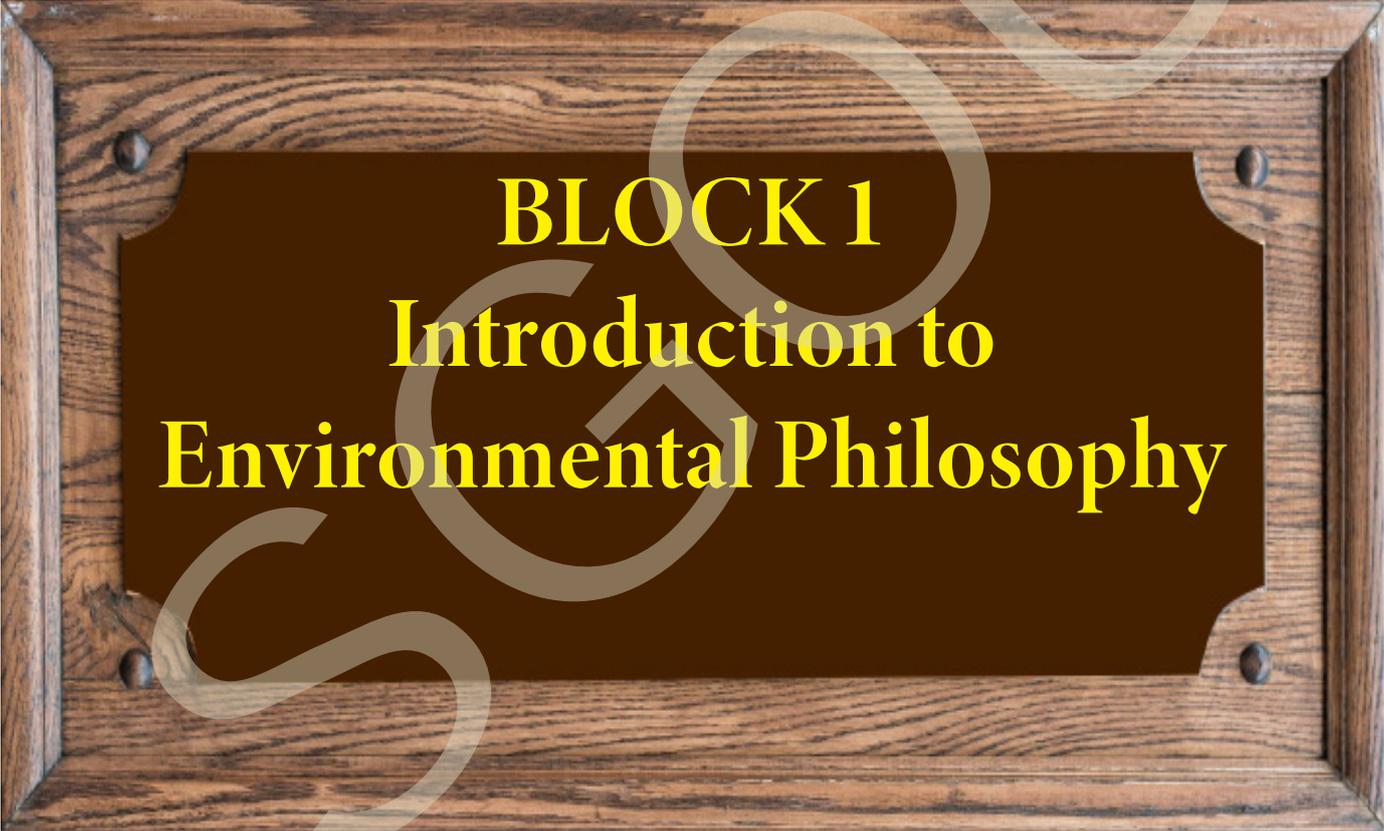


Warm regards.
Dr. Jagathy Raj V.P.

01-06-2025

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BLOCK 1
Introduction to
Environmental Philosophy

UNIT 1

Nature and Meaning of Environmental Philosophy

Learning Outcomes

After the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- understand the origin and scope of environmental philosophy
- examine how philosophical reflection can contribute to environmental awareness
- analyse the major debates and schools of thought within environmental philosophy
- critically assess the role of human responsibility toward nature

Background

Human life has always been closely related to the natural world—through its seasons, landscapes, and resources. However, in much of Western philosophy, nature has often been treated as a lifeless background where human actions take place. This idea became stronger with the rise of science and industrialisation, where nature came to be seen as something to study, control, and use. This way of thinking has created a distance between humans and the environment, leading to a harmful relationship. Environmental destruction is no longer a distant threat—it is part of our everyday reality. Climate change, extinction of species, deforestation, and pollution are all signs that our actions affect the entire web of life. But the environmental crisis is not just a scientific or political issue. It is also a deeply philosophical and ethical one. It raises difficult questions: Can we truly care about a river, a tree, or a forest? Should only human beings be treated with moral importance, or do other living beings—and even entire ecosystems—deserve care and respect too? Environmental philosophy started with these kinds of questions. It challenges the belief that only humans matter (a view called *anthropocentrism*) and asks us to imagine new ways of understanding value—where all life, or even nature as a whole, may be seen as meaningful. Environmental philosophy does not simply offer solutions to environmental issues such as pollution or climate change; rather, it asks us to rethink how we see ourselves and our place in the world.

Environmental philosophy draws its resources from many traditions. Indigenous worldviews often see nature as alive and sacred, based on a sense of connection and interdependence. Eastern philosophies like Taoism and Buddhism focus on living in harmony with nature's flow. In contrast, many Western ideas (certainly not all) have divided the human from nature. Environmental philosophy primarily challenges these divisions and invites us to explore more connected and respectful ways of living.

Keywords

Neo-Vedanta, Yoga, Practical Vedanta, Universal Religion

Discussion

1.1.1 Defining Environmental Philosophy

Environmental philosophy is a discipline that critically explores the metaphysical, ethical, epistemological, and political aspects of human life in relation to nature. It differs from environmental science, which is focused on observing ecosystems and the physical processes involved in them. Environmental philosophy raises more fundamental normative and conceptual questions regarding nature and our place within it. The following are some examples of the kinds of questions that environmental philosophy addresses: What is “nature”? Is the environment valuable in itself or only for its utility for human purposes? What are we bound to do for non-human beings, future generations, and the planet as a whole?

- Environmental philosophy addresses normative and conceptual questions about nature

At a general level, environmental philosophy attempts to supply a reflective context by means of which human beings can apprehend their relation to the environment. Instead of speaking of the environment as an “external” arena, it insists that human beings are embedded within an elaborate web of interrelated ecology. Such a view has powerful moral implications. If nature is not a passive resource but an essential part of the community of living things, then human dealings with it must be based on ethical principles, not merely on economic or utilitarian calculations.

- Reveals the environmental embeddedness of human beings

As an academic discipline, it emerged during the 1960s and 70s, along with the increasing awareness of pollution, habitat degradation, and the ecological limits of technology. Philosophers like Arne Naess, Aldo Leopold, and others



- An interdisciplinary discipline

started constructing new philosophical ideas of nature and offered major challenges to the anthropocentric idea that guided the study of the environment up to that time. Environmental philosophy is interdisciplinary in nature. It overlaps with ecology, political theory, religion, ethics, law, economics, and even aesthetics. It inquires not only what is wrong or right, but also what it means to live well in a more-than-human world. When addressing climate ethics, animal rights, environmental justice, or indigenous worldviews, the discipline provides a rich terrain for investigation. Through questioning the assumptions and values that underlie modern environmental practice, environmental philosophy does not just present opinions on environmental questions; instead, it specifies how we think about such questions. It gives a path for living in harmony with the environment.

1.1.2 Historical Roots of Environmental Thought

- Nature has life—a view prominent in different civilisations

Environmental philosophy builds on centuries of philosophical and cultural thought. To learn its history is to discover how various civilisations have understood the human-nature relationship. In much of indigenous understanding, nature is not seen as a mere aggregation of lifeless things but as a living presence. These worldviews are likely to stress balance, reciprocity, and moral responsibility to the environment. For example, Native Americans conceive of the natural world as a society of beings rather than a reservoir of resources. African spiritualities also confer spiritual presence to trees, rocks, and animals by resisting the objectification of nature.

- Relational nature of existence

Eastern philosophies such as Taoism realise that man is within nature, not outside of it. Taoism encourages *wu wei*, or doing without force or effort—working with the way of nature and not attempting to control it. This school of philosophy places more importance on living in harmony with nature than conquering it. Buddhism provides the theory of *pratītyasamutpāda* (dependent origination), characterising all existence as relational and co-arising. These worldviews conform to a kind of non-dualistic vision of the world where human beings are very much a part of the natural order.

On the other hand, Western philosophy spoke chiefly in a hierarchical language about nature. The thoughts of some key thinkers in that tradition are evident in this. Plato's metaphysics

- Human beings viewed themselves as over and above nature

placed the world of abstract forms over the world of matter. Aristotle's notion of *scala naturae* (great chain of being) posited life in an unchanging hierarchy, to which humans held the top position and inorganic matter at the bottom. Descartes proposed mind-matter dualism, transforming nature/matter into a mechanistic universe devoid of intrinsic value. This Cartesian perspective had a profound impact on the Scientific Revolution and Enlightenment thinking that emerged in Europe. This opened the door to using technology to exploit natural resources. More than environmental sensitivity, human reason tends to dominate nature.

- Counter currents of environmentalism in Western thought

The Western tradition is not monolithic, however. There were other voices—the Stoics, who preached living in harmony with nature, and the Romantics, who found spiritual renewal in the wilderness. Thoreau's saturation in Walden Pond and Emerson's transcendentalism sowed seeds for a holy interrelationship between man and nature. These views influenced 20th-century environmental philosophies to a great extent. Understanding these currents of history helps us to comprehend better the philosophical terrain on which environmental thinking today stands.

1.1.3 The Emergence of Environmental Philosophy as a Discipline

- A wake-up call against crucial environmental concerns

Environmental philosophy as an identifiable intellectual discipline emerged only in the mid-20th century, primarily responding to the then increasing environmental catastrophes of pollution, forest destruction, species loss, and global climate change. Although there have been centuries of concern about nature, this was a turning point. Philosophical questioning was invoked to consider the fundamental ethical and conceptual issues about our relationship with nature. The 1960s and 70s were times of beginnings, for example, especially in the agricultural sector where there was a call to stand up against widespread pesticide use. This was meant to sound an alarm at unlimited economic growth in the face of environmental degradation. Environmental degradation was thus no longer viewed as some isolated phenomenon but as a manifestation of more fundamental philosophical assumptions of man's mastery over nature.

The philosophical foundations of environmental philosophy were established by philosophers such as Arne Naess, who



- Beginnings of robust conceptual understanding of ecology

proposed the notion of deep ecology. Naess postulated that nature possesses *inherent value* independent of its value in relation to humans. Thus, he argued that human activities would have to be based on a deep reverence for the inherent value of nature. Another philosopher, Aldo Leopold, argued that we should extend our moral concern to entire ecosystems. He believed that humans are just one part of the *biotic community*—a network of all living things in a particular area, including animals, plants, soil, and microorganisms, all interacting with each other.

- More sub-branches of environmental philosophy developed

Ecofeminism, for example, saw the intersection of ecological destruction and women's oppression as based on patriarchal relations. By analysing patriarchal relations, ecofeminism linked the problem of the exploitation of nature and that of women together. Social ecology, led by intellectuals such as Murray Bookchin, emphasised the intersection between human environmental degradation and social hierarchies, advocating for a shift toward both social and ecological equality at the societal level. The philosophy of animal rights, as articulated by thinkers such as Peter Singer and Tom Regan, challenged the dominance of human beings and advocated for the moral treatment of animals.

- Environmental philosophy as an academic discipline

By the 1980s and 90s, environmental philosophy extended to interdisciplinary discussion, incorporating metaphysical questions (What is the nature of the environment?), epistemological questions (How do we know our relation to nature?), and political philosophy (How should we organise our societies to preserve the environment?). Universities began offering special courses, and the development of environmental ethics, eco-phenomenology, and green political theory further established the discipline. Environmental philosophy challenges us to rethink the very structures that constitute our comprehension of existence and value in relation to nature.

1.1.4 Key Questions and Themes in Environmental Philosophy

Environmental philosophy poses basic questions regarding the moral, political, and metaphysical aspects of our human existence in nature. It invites us to critically examine the assumptions that have governed human relations with nature. Followed by that, it provides alternative models of coexistence, justice, and sustainability. One of the central themes is the anthropocentrism vs. ecocentrism debate. Anthropocentrism

- Ecocentrism against Anthropocentrism

puts human beings at the centre of moral consideration, usually justifying the exploitation of nature on behalf of human beings. Ecocentrism, on the other hand, acknowledges the intrinsic value of nature—appreciating plants, animals, ecosystems, and even inanimate natural objects not just as a function of their usefulness to human beings, but for themselves.

- Moral worth of the rest of nature

Thinkers such as Arne Naess, who began the deep ecology movement, urged a revolutionary shift in thinking. It sees humans as just one part of the larger web of life. Likewise, Aldo Leopold’s “land ethic” urged an ethical expansion of community to soils, waters, plants, and animals—the “biotic community.” Closely related to this is the question of moral considerability. What or who is worthy of moral consideration? Environmental philosophers would argue that consideration must be extended to non-human animals, challenging the idea of speciesism, or unjustifiable bias towards the interests of the human species. Peter Singer stressed that reducing suffering is a moral duty we owe to all beings that can feel pain. Tom Regan framed his position on the intrinsic value of animals as subjects-of-a-life, rather than tools.

- The question of environmental justice as a political one

Another important theme is environmental justice, which considers how ecological breakdown disproportionately hurts marginalised and vulnerable groups of people. Such a condition is rampant particularly in the world’s poor nations. It resists the idea that environmental concerns are strictly about “nature,” asserting that such concerns thoroughly have social and political dimensions. The intersectionality of class, race, gender, and ecological devastation is at the heart of eco-justice discourse, which holds that domination over nature and the oppression of poor people are often linked under exploitative regimes.

- The question of sustainability

Philosophers are also very interested in the notion of sustainability to ensure that we consume what we need today without damaging nature’s capacity to produce what future generations will need. Sustainability is actually all about harmony between human development and nature’s health. It is more than harmony, though. It pushes us to question the very notion of perpetual economic growth. Can we continue to expand economies indefinitely on a planet with finite resources? Sustainability challenges us to rethink our definition of progress and development, from unlimited consumption to secure well-being—for people and the planet.



- Nature inspires aesthetics

Environmental aesthetics adds another layer by looking at how natural landscapes influence human perception, ethics, and health through their beauty and sublimity. Natural landscapes are not just scenic backdrops; they form cultures, inspire art, and even moral sentiment. This aesthetic connection with the environment is at the same time highly subjective and politically engaged, particularly when conservation and cultural identity are at stake. So, such questions also form part of the problematic of environmental philosophy.

1.1.5 Major Thinkers in Environmental Philosophy

- Arne Naess and deep ecology

The field of environmental philosophy has been significantly shaped by diverse thinkers who challenged anthropocentric worldviews and proposed ethical ways of engaging with the natural world. A foundational voice in this discourse was the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess, who introduced the concept of deep ecology—a perspective that moves beyond shallow environmentalism concerned only with pollution or resource use. Naess emphasised the intrinsic value of all living beings and called for a radical shift in human consciousness toward an eco-centric worldview.

- Blend of science and moral clarity

Echoing a similar ethical concern, American ecologist Aldo Leopold proposed the “land ethic,” asking humanity to include soil, water, plants, and animals in its moral community. For Leopold, a thing is right when it preserves the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic whole. This view challenges the utilitarian exploitation of nature for human ends. Rachel Carson, whose groundbreaking work *Silent Spring* exposed the environmental damage caused by pesticide use, provided an eloquent blend of science and moral clarity that laid the foundation for modern ecological awareness and demanded accountability from both governments and industries.

- Animals are “subjects-of-a-life”

Meanwhile, Peter Singer introduced a utilitarian approach to environmental and animal ethics by challenging the notion of speciesism. It is a view that privileges the interests of the human species over those of other sentient beings. His arguments for considering animal suffering as ethically significant had a profound impact on debates around environmental justice. A contrasting but complementary approach came from Tom Regan, who emphasised a rights-based framework, arguing that animals are “subjects-of-a-life” and thus possess inherent moral rights, regardless of their usefulness to humans.

- Animals are “subjects-of-a-life”

Another powerful intervention came from Australian ecofeminist Val Plumwood, who critiqued the deep-seated conceptual dualisms like reason/emotion and human/nature. Such binaries underpin both environmental degradation and the oppression of women. She argued for an ethics of interdependence, breaking down the hierarchies that separate humans from nature. Complementing this view was James Lovelock’s Gaia Hypothesis, a bold reimagining of Earth as a self-regulating organism. Though scientific in origin, this hypothesis inspired a broader philosophical reflection on the interconnectedness of all life systems.

- Bookchin connected environmental harm to social injustice

Murray Bookchin’s theory of social ecology added a political dimension by linking environmental destruction to social hierarchies and capitalist structures. He emphasised the need for democratic ecological governance, seeing environmental crises as deeply tied to issues of justice, domination, and institutional design. Through these varied but interconnected perspectives, environmental philosophy emerges not as a single voice but as a group of ethical, political, and spiritual calls to rethink humanity’s place within a fragile and interconnected world.

Summarized Overview

Environmental philosophy extensively investigates human relations with nature, criticising anthropocentric viewpoints, which give priority to human interests and promote ecocentric interests that recognise the inherent worth of all living entities. Arne Næss introduced the theory of deep ecology, which says that people often misunderstand the true connection between all living beings. He believed we need a fundamental change in how we think about the human-nature relationship. This will help us recognise that humans are not above nature but are simply part of the larger ecological community. Aldo Leopold’s land ethic was built on ethical responsibility by expanding that responsibility to include soil, water, plants, and animals, collectively called the biotic community in its integrity and beauty. Rachel Carson raised public concern regarding the threat of pesticides and motivated environmental activism and awareness by underscoring responsible stewardship of nature. Philosophers such as Peter Singer and Tom Regan placed animal rights in the spotlight, with Singer objecting to speciesism on a utilitarian basis and Regan defending animals’ intrinsic value and subject-of-a-life rights. Ecofeminist Val Plumwood criticised Western philosophy’s conceptual dualisms that have caused the domination of both women and nature and endorsed an ethic of care and interdependence. James Lovelock’s Gaia Hypothesis introduced the Earth as an adaptive and self-regulating system, further solidifying the idea of an interdependent world. Murray Bookchin’s social ecology detailed the connection

between environmental destruction and capitalist forms, in support of democratic and ecological political association. Environmental philosophy deals with issues such as sustainability. We should meet today's needs without harming future generations' ability to meet theirs. Also, environmental harm often affects poor and powerless people the most. Through introducing ethical, political, and religious perspectives, environmental philosophy calls for a reconsideration of human identity and obligation, in favour of a more sustainable and equitable Earth.

Self-Assessment

1. Compare and contrast anthropocentrism and ecocentrism. How do these perspectives influence environmental decision-making?
2. Explain Arne Næss's concept of deep ecology.
3. Discuss Aldo Leopold's "land ethic." How does this ethic redefine the relationship between humans and the natural environment?
4. Analyse the contributions of ecofeminism to environmental ethics.

Assignments

1. How does viewing Earth as a self-regulating organism influence environmental ethics?
2. Assess the role of indigenous knowledge systems in environmental conservation.
3. Critically examine the concept of environmental justice. How does it address the disproportionate environmental burdens faced by marginalised communities?

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Suggested Reading

1. Callicott, J. B. (1999). *Beyond the land ethic: More essays in environmental philosophy*. State University of New York Press.
2. Næss, A. (1973). The shallow and the deep, long-range ecology movement: A summary. *Inquiry*, 16(1-4), 95-100.
3. Warren, K. J. (1990). The power and the promise of ecological feminism. *Environmental Ethics*, 12(2), 125-146.



Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.

SGOU

UNIT 2

Approaches of Vedanta and Buddhism to Nature

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit, students will be able to:

- describe the Vedantic view of nature as a manifestation of Brahman
- explain the Buddhist perspective on nature, focusing on impermanence and interdependence
- compare the ethical implications of both traditions regarding environmental responsibility
- apply insights from Vedanta and Buddhism to contemporary environmental challenges

Background

Vedanta and Buddhism, two profound Indian philosophical traditions, offer distinct yet complementary perspectives on the nature of reality and our relationship with the environment. In Advaita Vedanta, the ultimate reality is Brahman—an all-encompassing, non-dual consciousness. Nature (Prakriti) is seen as a manifestation of Brahman, devoid of independent existence. The physical world is considered an illusion (Maya), and true understanding arises from realising the unity of the self (Atman) with Brahman. This realisation fosters a sense of reverence and responsibility towards all aspects of nature, recognising them as expressions of the divine. In contrast, Buddhism emphasises the concepts of impermanence (Anicca), suffering (Dukkha), and non-self (Anatta). Nature is perceived as a dynamic interplay of interdependent phenomena, constantly changing and devoid of inherent essence. The doctrine of Buddha-nature suggests that all beings possess the potential for enlightenment, highlighting the interconnectedness of all life forms. Ethically, this perspective encourages compassion and mindfulness towards the environment, recognising that human actions impact the broader ecological balance. While Vedanta emphasises the realisation of unity with the divine essence underlying nature, Buddhism focuses on ethical living through mindfulness and compassion. Bringing these ideas together helps us take better care of nature.



Keywords

Brahman, Maya, Anicca, Anatta, Interdependence, Environmental Ethics life

Discussion

1.2.1 Vedantic Metaphysics of Nature

The Vedantic philosophy of nature follows from its metaphysical assumption—non-duality (Advaita). In this, existence finally is Brahman: infinite, formless, eternal, and unseparated. All that exists—trees, rivers, animals, human beings—is merely a fleeting appearance of this single reality. Maya, world illusion, generates the experience of multiplicity and difference, but these are epistemic deceptions, not ontological ones. For example, the river Ganges is an object, and yet a blessed stream of Brahman temporarily masked by form. This philosophy overcomes the distinction between subject and object and man and all the rest in the ecosystem. A use can be found in the sanctity accorded to animals such as cows in Indian society—not utilitarian logic, but because they are part of the sacred whole. Nature is not outside the self but an extension of the spiritual nature of the self. Therefore, Vedanta invokes a spiritual and reflective attitude towards nature.

- Nature is the living expression of the divine whole

1.2.2 Vedic Environmental Philosophy

This metaphysical position of the unity of existence—that everything is Brahman, that exists in and of itself is the product of the undivided, endless Being. This is the basis of Vedantic philosophy. So, from the point of everyday ethics, this experience of oneness makes full sense of moral direction toward being. Ahimsa (non-violence) here is an ontological necessity following from the sense of non-separation. In order to recognise the self (Atman) as identical with Brahman, avoidance of causing injury to any living or non-living being is essential. Otherwise, it is a failure of vision in perceiving the oneness behind the diversity of appearance.

- Vedantic Ahimsa is a product of the vision of non-duality

In Vedantic thought, the world is conceived as something sacred. It is seen as an expression of the divine to be lived with reverence. According to the concept of *Maya*, the world we experience is constantly changing and temporary. That does not make it unreal in a negative or nihilistic sense. Rather, the world (*jagat*) appears this way because of human ignorance. In truth,

- Nature itself is an ongoing presence of the divine

it is a real expression of *Brahman*—the eternal reality—taking on visible form (*prathibhasika satta*). This view shapes Indian cultural and spiritual practices, where nature is not worshipped sentimentally, but through a deep understanding of its divine essence. Trees, rivers, mountains, animals, and even elements like fire and wind are honoured as embodiments of the sacred. In India’s rich and diverse local religions, this reverence takes many ritualistic forms. It is not about replacing nature with the divine, but seeing nature as already divine. The invocation of river Ganga in prayer is an example of that.

- Ecological harmony by eliminating the illusion of differentiation

This ethics places human beings in the role of shepherds instead of spoilers of cosmic order. The Vedantic self is not a lord of creation, but part of a holistic unity subject to *Rta*—the cosmic order. This cosmology bears some resemblance to deep ecology from a spiritual understanding of oneness. The realisation that the same Atman fills every living entity calls for a simple, humble, and devotional life. This is where the *Tyaga*, the ethics of renunciation, comes in. Withdrawal from society is not part of *Tyaga*, but the renouncing of egoistic desire and possessiveness is. It is a shift from consumption to consciousness, from self-gratification to self-control. On the Vedanta path, to eat less is not renunciation but freedom—a way of respecting the sacredness of all. Desires are not delegitimised but seen as requiring training and cultivation. Thus, ecological balance will be ensured not due to fear of scarcity but out of spiritual understanding.

- To know is to care, and to care is to guard

Above everything else, Vedantic environmental ethics rests not on external law or institutional necessity. Instead, it demands an inner change of consciousness, whereby the ego is quieted and greater identification with all life is established. Such care develops from spontaneity. When the seer beholds the divine in the tree, in the earth, in water, in the sky, care comes naturally and exploitation is not possible. Vedantic environmentalism is thus cosmo-centric. It is not anthropocentric. It does not ask how nature can be beneficial to man, but how men can live harmoniously with the Whole. It imagines the earth not as a resource, but as an expression of divine play (*Lila*).



1.2.4 Buddhist Metaphysics: Impermanence and Interdependence

Buddhist philosophy approaches nature through a radically different metaphysical lens. At its core lies the doctrine of *Anicca* (impermanence): all phenomena, including those in nature, are in constant flux. Coupled with *Anatta* (non-self), which denies any permanent, unchanging identity, this leads to a worldview where every existence is interdependent. The key doctrine of *Pratītyasamutpāda* (dependent origination) affirms that nothing exists in isolation; all entities arise in mutual dependence. A tree exists because of soil, sunlight, water, and countless conditions co-arising together. This insight fosters a deep ecological sensibility—an understanding that the well-being of each entity is inseparable from the health of the whole. Unlike Vedanta, Buddhism does not posit an eternal substance like Brahman; instead, it affirms a dynamic processual universe where compassion arises not from metaphysical identity but from mutual vulnerability and shared existence.

1.2.5 Buddhist Metaphysics

Buddhist metaphysics is rooted in the understanding of three core principles: impermanence (*Anicca*), suffering (*Dukkha*), and non-self (*Anatta*). These concepts are not merely philosophical abstractions but reflect a deep insight into the nature of existence and the interconnectedness of all things. Impermanence emphasises that all phenomena, whether living or non-living, are in a constant state of flux. Nothing remains the same; all things are subject to change, decay, and eventual cessation. This recognition of impermanence fosters a sense of urgency in Buddhist practice, encouraging practitioners to focus on what is truly important.

- Spiritual growth and the alleviation of suffering

Impermanence teaches us that nothing is fixed, urging us to embrace change with wisdom. Suffering (*Dukkha*) is seen as an inherent aspect of existence. It is not limited to overt pain or discomfort but includes more subtle forms of dissatisfaction arising from attachment, desire, and ignorance. Buddhism teaches that suffering is inextricably linked to our attachment to things that are impermanent and our inability to accept the transient nature of life. This awareness of suffering leads to the pursuit of the cessation of suffering, which is achieved through ethical living, wisdom, and the cultivation of mindfulness.

- Suffering reveals the root of our discontent

The principle of non-self (*Anatta*) challenges the conventional notion of a permanent, unchanging self. According to this teaching, what we consider to be our “self” is actually a collection of constantly changing physical and mental processes. There is no fixed, independent essence that constitutes our identity. This realisation dissolves the illusion of separation and reinforces the understanding that all beings are interconnected, part of a larger whole. The illusion of self dissolves as we realise our shared existence in a constantly changing world.

- Karma binds us to the world

These metaphysical insights shape the Buddhist worldview, emphasising the interconnectedness of all phenomena. This interconnectedness is not limited to human beings but extends to all forms of life, the environment, and even the universe. The concept of Karma, central to Buddhist metaphysics, further reinforces this idea of interdependence. Karma teaches that every action, thought, and intention has consequences that ripple through the fabric of existence, affecting not only the individual but the larger community and environment. Our actions are not isolated; they are part of a web of causes and effects that shape the world around us.

- Mindfulness and compassion guide us to act responsibly

In this context, Buddhist metaphysics fosters a deep sense of ethical responsibility. The recognition of interdependence and the impermanent nature of life encourages mindfulness and compassion, guiding practitioners toward actions that are beneficial to both themselves and the world around them. This interconnectedness is not simply an intellectual understanding but is meant to be embodied in one’s everyday life and interactions with others, including the environment.

- Mindfulness and compassion unite to guide us in protecting all life

1.2.6 Buddhist Environmental Ethics

Buddhist environmental ethics is deeply rooted in the metaphysical understanding of impermanence, suffering, and non-self, as well as the teachings on interdependence and Karma. At the heart of Buddhist ethics is the cultivation of mindfulness (*Sati*) and compassion (*Karuna*). Mindfulness is the state of awareness of the present without judgement. It encourages practitioners to be fully aware of their thoughts, actions, and the impact they have on the world, while compassion promotes a deep sense of empathy for all living beings. Together, these qualities form the foundation of a Buddhist environmental ethic that is deeply concerned with minimising harm to the natural world and recognising the intrinsic value of all life forms.



- The Five Precepts guide us to live with respect for all life

Central to this ethical vision are the Five Precepts, which provide guidelines for ethical conduct. These precepts encourage Buddhists to refrain from killing, stealing, engaging in sexual misconduct, lying, and intoxication. While these precepts are primarily concerned with human behaviour, their application extends to how we interact with the environment and other species. For instance, the precept against killing extends to animals and ecosystems, encouraging Buddhists to treat all living beings with respect and kindness. Similarly, the Buddhist ideal of Right Livelihood (*Samma Ājīva*) emphasises that one should earn a living in a way that does not cause harm to others or to the environment. This principle encourages sustainable practices and ethical consumption.

- Buddhist Monks' stewardship of sacred forests

Buddhist monks and lay followers have historically played significant roles in environmental preservation, particularly in the context of forest conservation. In many Buddhist cultures, forests are seen as sacred spaces, often associated with meditation and spiritual practice. Monks have historically been caretakers of these forests, working to protect them from deforestation and other forms of ecological degradation. In response to increasing deforestation, Buddhist monks in Thailand began symbolically ordaining trees as monks by wrapping them in saffron robes and performing traditional ordination rituals. This role reflects an ethic of protection and care for the earth, grounded in the understanding that all life is interconnected.

- Meditation heightens our awareness

Meditation, a core practice in Buddhism, also contributes to the cultivation of an environmentally conscious mindset. Through meditation, practitioners develop a heightened awareness of the interconnectedness of all things. This sensibility encourages a deeper appreciation for the natural world and a more mindful approach to living. The practice of meditation helps individuals become more attentive to the consequences of their actions. This provides them with a sense of responsibility toward the environment and all living beings. The recognition that our actions have far-reaching effects on others encourages an ethic of sustainability and ecological stewardship.

In Buddhist thought, environmental degradation is seen not just as a physical crisis but a moral and spiritual failure. It arises from the root causes of greed, delusion, and disconnection

- Environmental degradation reflects a deeper spiritual disconnect

from the natural world. These negative mental states lead to the exploitation of resources, the destruction of ecosystems, and the suffering of sentient beings. Buddhism teaches that true liberation is not just an individual pursuit but involves the liberation of all beings. Therefore, caring for the earth and its ecosystems becomes a path to both personal spiritual growth and collective well-being.

- Buddhist environmental activism blends ancient wisdom with modern science

Buddhist environmental activism often blends ancient wisdom with modern ecological science, advocating for sustainable lifestyles, veganism, and systems thinking. This activism emphasizes the need to live in harmony with nature and to adopt lifestyles that are less exploitative of the environment. It also highlights the importance of recognizing the interconnectedness of ecological systems and the need for systemic change to address environmental challenges such as climate change, deforestation, and biodiversity loss.

- Rejection of egoism, pointing us toward a holistic view of existence

1.2.7 Comparative Reflections

Vedanta and Buddhism, while differing in their metaphysical orientations, converge in their shared emphasis on a non-dual, non-egoic relationship with nature. Vedanta affirms a permanent self (Atman) and ultimate reality (Brahman), viewing the universe as a reflection of divine unity. In contrast, Buddhism denies the existence of a permanent self, teaching that all phenomena, including the self, are impermanent and interdependent. Despite these differences, both traditions challenge the anthropocentric view of nature, promoting a vision where all beings are interconnected.

- Sacred unity and interdependence converge

The Vedantic vision of sacred unity, where everything is an expression of the divine, aligns with the Buddhist awareness of interdependence, where all things are linked through causes and conditions. This shared perspective emphasizes the interconnectedness of all life, encouraging humility and non-harm in relation to the environment. Both traditions recognize that true wisdom involves understanding the unity of existence and acting with reverence and care for all beings, whether human or non-human.

Ethically, both Vedanta and Buddhism move away from exploitation and toward stewardship and reverence for the Earth. Vedanta, grounded in the belief of divine presence in all things, encourages humans to live in harmony with nature



- Promoting care for the Earth as a moral responsibility

as part of their spiritual duty. Buddhism, while starting from a framework of impermanence and no-self, promotes ethical living through mindfulness, compassion, and a deep awareness of the consequences of one's actions. In both systems, care for the environment is not an optional act but a moral imperative.

- Blend of Vedanta's mysticism with Buddhist ethics, a comprehensive approach to environmental wisdom

Vedanta offers a mystical vision, while Buddhism offers an ethical blueprint for practical living. Taken together, these two systems provide a rich and varied spiritual ecology, reminding us that environmental wisdom can emerge from multiple pathways of thought. Vedanta's sacred understanding and Buddhism's ethical mindfulness can be integrated to form a holistic approach to environmental issues, enriching both spiritual practice and ecological action. Their combined wisdom offers diverse avenues for cultivating a deep and respectful relationship with the environment.

1.2.8 Applications to Contemporary Environmental Challenges

- Urging minimalism and reverence in all actions

The insights from Vedanta and Buddhism are not mere relics of ancient thought; they offer timely responses to the ecological crises. In a world facing climate change, species extinction, and unsustainable consumption, both traditions call for a fundamental shift in human consciousness. Vedanta encourages us to see nature not as a mere resource to be exploited but as a manifestation of the divine, urging us to live in harmony with the environment through practices of minimalism, simplicity, and sacred activism.

- Challenges consumerism and promotes eco-consciousness through mindful action

Buddhism, similarly, provides an approach to environmentalism rooted in mindfulness-based ecological action. Buddhist teachings challenge the rampant consumerism that fuels environmental degradation, advocating for sustainable habits cultivated through mindfulness and awareness. By being present with our consumption and its consequences, Buddhism encourages the development of compassionate, eco-conscious habits that minimise harm to the environment.

- Vedanta and Buddhism call for a spiritual reawakening to save the Earth

Together, the philosophies of Vedanta and Buddhism inspire contemporary movements such as Deep Ecology, Spiritual Ecology, and Environmentalism. These movements emphasise that addressing ecological degradation is not just a technological or political issue but a spiritual and ethical endeavour that requires a shift in our values and priorities.

Both traditions remind us that caring for the Earth is a sacred act that requires a deep commitment to environmental justice and collective well-being.

Summarized Overview

Vedanta and Buddhism, though metaphysically divergent, converge in their profound ecological sensibilities based on non-dualism, humility, and ethical praxis. Vedanta confirms the interconnectedness of all being, conceiving nature as a sacred expansion of the divine self, while Buddhism focuses on impermanence and interdependence, highlighting the ethical obligation of wise living and benevolent care. These complementary traditions deconstruct the human-nature relationship and encourage a stewardship attitude, respect, and spiritual coexistence with the natural world. In the battle with environmental crises, these traditions become more and more relevant. Both call for an interior transformation—a shift in consciousness—as the foundation for ecological renewal. Vedanta calls for sacred activism on the premises of simplicity and oneness, and Buddhism provides such tools as mindfulness to combat consumerism and create sustainable living. Together, they invite spiritual ecologies more than doctrine, reminding us that ecological action is not political or scientific, but deeply ethical and existential. This combination of ancient wisdom and contemporary need presents a powerful paradigm for meeting the ecological crises of our time. By combining Vedantic sacredness with Buddhist pragmatism, individuals and communities can become more aware, caring, and sustainable in their practice of dwelling on the planet.

Self-Assessment

1. What is the key metaphysical difference between Vedanta and Buddhism regarding the concept of self?
2. How do both Vedanta and Buddhism oppose anthropocentrism in their environmental perspectives?
3. What are the complementary strengths offered by Vedanta and Buddhism in their approach to environmental ethics?
4. How does Vedanta reinterpret nature in light of its spiritual worldview?
5. What role does mindfulness play in Buddhist approaches to environmentalism?



Assignments

1. Compare and contrast the metaphysical assumptions of Vedanta and Buddhism. How do these influence their respective environmental ethics?
2. Examine how both Vedantic and Buddhist ethical teachings challenge consumerism and promote sustainability.
3. Evaluate the relevance of Vedanta and Buddhism in shaping contemporary environmental movements. Provide examples where appropriate.
4. “Environmental wisdom can emerge from multiple pathways of thought.” Critically analyse this statement with reference to Vedanta and Buddhism.
5. Reflect on how inner transformation is linked to ecological responsibility in both Vedantic and Buddhist traditions.

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UNIT 3

Anthropocentric and Non-Anthropocentric Debate in Environmental Ethics

Learning Outcomes

After the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- understand the key distinction between anthropocentric and non-anthropocentric approaches in environmental ethics
- examine major thinkers and schools of thought that advocate each perspective
- evaluate criticisms of anthropocentrism
- reflect on the implications of both approaches for contemporary environmental policymaking and ecological justice.

Background

Human beings possess a history of perceiving themselves as at the centre of the universe. From the Ptolemaic universe, which places Earth at the centre of celestial order, to Cartesian dualism, which rigidly compartmentalised humans and non-humans, several metaphysical traditions have defended this perspective of human exceptionalism. In such cosmologies, nature was frequently described as passive, inert, and morally silent; a stage for human activities, but not as a participant. Ethics, thus framed in the anthropocentric model, remained largely contained within the human sphere. Moral duties, obligations, and rights were conceived as pertaining only to creatures of our kind, while the rest of creation was there for the satisfaction of human wants, needs, and aspirations. Industrial modernity still reinforced this binary. Enlightenment reason, technological development, and capital expansion depended upon the idea of nature as something to be mastered—uncontrollable material to be conquered, quantified, and transformed. From this vantage point, ecological ruin was not seen as a moral issue but an economic or technical one. The “development” discourse viewed forests as wood, rivers as hydropower resources, and animals as products. The world was no longer a common home but a storehouse for human purposes. However, the increasing ecological crises, such as climate change, loss of biodiversity, ocean acidification, and toxic pollution, have led to profound and prolonged philosophical reflection. Do we still

justify moral concern on the basis of human interest alone? Or do we broaden our moral horizon to include non-human animals, plants, ecosystems, and even abstract features of nature? These issues signal the beginning of environmental ethics as a discipline, challenging anthropocentric presumptions and allowing room for non-anthropocentric alternatives. This unit covers the anthropocentric versus non-anthropocentric position in environmental ethics, a basic conflict between the school of thought that views nature as a means to human ends and the school of thought that believes that nature has intrinsic value—that it should be given moral consideration in and of itself, regardless of the fact that it might be useful to humans. The case is not so much one of expanding moral rights, but one of reconsidering the ontological and ethical basis of our relationship with nature.

Keywords

Anthropocentrism, Non-Anthropocentrism, Intrinsic Value, Instrumental Value

Discussion

1.3.1 Anthropocentric Ethics: Man as the Measure of All Things

- Humans as the central actors in deciding the value of everything

Anthropocentric ethics places human beings centre stage when it comes to moral regard. This school holds that only human beings are the creatures possessed of the virtue of moral agency. The distinctive feature of being capable of reasoning, independence, and introspection is attributed only to humans. The roots of anthropocentrism can be found in ancient Greek philosophy, for example, in philosophers like Aristotle, who established humans as reasoning animals apart from the rest of nature. Nonetheless, it was during the Age of Enlightenment and the rise of scientific materialism that the human-centred worldview became strengthened. Nature has no intrinsic value in this perspective and only relies on its usefulness to humans.

- The utilitarian and economic justification for humanity's right to exploit nature

In environmental ethics, anthropocentrism tends to legitimise the exploitation of nature by considering natural things—forests, rivers, or animals—to be resources to be exploited for human purposes. This ethical approach is centred on the instrumental value of nature: i.e., the value of nature is only legitimate because it serves to contribute to human flourishing. That contribution is in the form of food, beauty, or economic gain. One obvious expression of this outlook is the utilitarian ethic,



in which the value of nature is based on the greatest good of the greatest number of human persons. For instance, deforestation is justified if it results in economic development or material resources for society. Also, the stewardship philosophy in some Western and Christian societies views humankind as being responsible for caring for Earth, but the stewardship in such a case is more about taking care of the world only for human society's health.

- Anthropocentrism holds human beings as masters over nature

Additionally, anthropocentrism looks at the needs and desires of humans more than the health of non-human things. So, humans become the standard by which everything else is measured. Anthropocentric moral choices are typically driven by pragmatism and self-interest, wherein human needs are fulfilled and the interests and rights of non-human others are only taken into account to the degree that they fulfil human needs. Human beings are set over nature. The concept of nature as a passive and manageable resource has been the implicit foundation of practices like industrial agriculture, resource extraction, and land destruction for urbanisation, all of which are examples of exploiting nature for human purposes.

1.3.2 Ethical Narrowness and Anthropocentric Blind Spots

- Anthropocentrism's moral vision is too narrow

While anthropocentrism serves as a prominent ethical standpoint in Western thought, its critics argue that this human-centred approach is morally shortsighted. By restricting moral consideration to human beings, anthropocentrism arbitrarily limits the scope of moral duty, ignoring the intrinsic worth of non-human life forms. For instance, if we adopt sentience, the capacity to experience pain and pleasure, as the benchmark for moral consideration, then animals, which can suffer, deserve moral consideration just as much as humans. Proponents of utilitarian ethics extend the ethical circle to include all beings capable of suffering, by critiquing the anthropocentric tendency to disregard animal suffering. This bias that favours human beings is seen as ethically unjustifiable by thinkers who assert that moral consideration should be based on the ability to experience life, rather than the ability to reason or possess autonomy.

Furthermore, anthropocentrism leads to a reductionist view of life. It fails to acknowledge the complex interdependencies that exist between species, ecosystems, and the environment.

- Anthropocentrism reduces nature to mere resources

Nature is often reduced to resources for consumption, devoid of its deeper relational and ecological significance. This reductionism also fails to recognise the ecological role of every species and entity within an ecosystem. For example, the extinction of a species may seem trivial in the anthropocentric model if it doesn't directly affect human interests. However, from an ecological perspective, the disappearance of a species could trigger a chain reaction, disrupting the balance of ecosystems, as in the case of a breakage in an existing food chain. Anthropocentrism reinforces an unsustainable relationship with the environment.

- Anthropocentrism ignores the need to preserve nature for its own inherent value

Moreover, critics argue that anthropocentrism devalues the worth of human life itself. When human life is closely intertwined with the rest of the environment, the value of human life is also coupled with that of the relation between humans and the environment. Negating that amounts to undermining the place of human beings themselves. The ethical blind spots of anthropocentrism ultimately ignore the interconnectedness of all life and the moral obligation to preserve the environment for its own sake, not just for human use.

Non-Anthropocentric Ethics: Re-Centering Nature

- The world is not for us—it simply is

Non-anthropocentric ethics is a revolutionary philosophical shift. It is dedicated to decentering the human person as the sole decision-maker of value. This shift is predicated on a more profound ontological understanding: that the human species is just one node in an interlocked web of life. The Enlightenment ideal of the independent, rational self sitting atop the moral hierarchy is replaced here. Non-anthropocentric authors such as Holmes Rolston III contend that value does not merely emerge from rational agents, but also from the processes and structures of ecological systems themselves. The existence of mountain ranges, the equilibrium of wetlands, and the quiet expansion of forests are not for serving human purpose but instantiations of value in themselves.

One melodramatic illustration of this ethical transformation is the legal and cultural designation of rivers and forests as rights-holding persons. New Zealand's Whanganui River became a person in law in 2017, confirming a Māori epistemology where the river is an ancestor and living being. The same has been achieved in Bolivia and Ecuador, whose

- Recognition of rights does not arise out of usefulness but out of being

constitutions acknowledge the rights of nature. These are not merely legalistic but manifest a metaphysical commitment that nature is not passive, nor inert. Indigenous societies such as the Ojibwe's (North America) understanding of *Manoomin* (wild rice) illustrate a profound shift in ethical thinking that places nature at the centre. In this view, *Manoomin* is not merely a natural resource for human consumption; it is regarded as a living relative with intrinsic value and agency.

- Non-anthropocentric ethics dispels the illusion of separateness

The spirit of non-anthropocentric ethics is thus in the reconceptualisation of the moral community. This community is not sentience- or rationality-based but cooperation in the public ecological order. Philosopher Arne Naess refers to the "ecological self," where individual identity transcends ego and species boundaries to become part of a greater community. This is not a romantic affair with nature but a radical change of heart. The move from "I am in the environment" to "I am the environment" is no longer poetic but an ethical one. The human is remade not as lord of nature, but as a relative of nature.

Criticism of Non-Anthropocentrism: Ethical and Practical Dilemmas

- If everything is equally important, then nothing is actually able to be prioritised

Despite its utopian notion, non-anthropocentric ethics has encountered numerous philosophical and practical criticisms. Of particular concern is the problem of moral over-extension. In giving moral consideration to every living and even inanimate thing, the system risks becoming ethically cumbersome. For example, how does one morally weigh the felling of a tree against the feeding of a starving multitude? Or prioritise saving a predator species over saving an endangered population? Bryan Norton and others criticise that this "flat" moral terrain has challenges for ethical prioritisation. Environmental action typically involves tough choices. A moral system equally applicable to all entities may well subvert pressing human and environmental interests by not providing prioritised hierarchies.

- The coronation of rights upon nature might impose human assumptions on the non-human

A further philosophical issue is anthropomorphising nature. In attempting to grant rights and agency to rivers, mountains, and forests, critics argue that non-anthropocentric ethics logically contradicts itself in attributing human categories to the non-human sphere. Granting "rights" rests on legal agency and consciousness. Things, trees, and rivers hardly have such agency. Philosopher Luc Ferry cautions against elevating

nature to quasi-divine status. Moreover, if rights are grounded in human institutions, then what does it mean to assert that nature “has” those rights?

- Romanticising nature replaces ethical objectivity with ecological sentimentality

More existentially grounded in their criticism is the argument that non-anthropocentrism will inadvertently sentimentalise nature and ignore its brutal, indifferent, and anarchic aspects. Nature, magnificent as it is, is in no way necessarily good. Pathology, predation, the elements—those are natural phenomena as well. Present as inherent to nature might be idealisations which cover up the brutality of ecological life. This is not to dismiss the value of nature but to ask for a more rational engagement. Nature does not “care” about us; it simply exists. In this view, environmental ethics can more soundly be grounded on realistic interdependence rather than mystical reverence.

1.3.5 Comparison of Anthropocentric and Non-Anthropocentric Approaches

- What’s at stake is what sort of beings we think we are

The structural variation between anthropocentric and non-anthropocentric ethics is in their varying moral ontologies. Anthropocentrism starts with the human as the standard of all value; it inquires how nature is at the service of human flourishing. Non-anthropocentrism, on the other hand, demands a re-imagining of the moral space to encompass non-human and even non-sentient others. Non-anthropocentrism takes its ideas from ecological holism, deep ecology, and indigenous worldviews that erase the dichotomy of the subject-object between human and nature.

- The same act can be defended or criticised based on the ethical model

Take the case of deforestation. Anthropocentrically, the forest is required because it yields certain basic ecosystem services such as oxygen, climate control, and human life support in terms of biodiversity. Conservation then becomes an exercise in wise use of resources. But non-anthropocentrically, the forest is valuable whether human existence exists or not. Cutting down a tree is an ethical disservice not because it harms us, but because it disrupts a living system that thus has the right to exist. In practice, this amounts to varied environmental policies—anthropocentric ethics can provide grounds for sustainable logging, while non-anthropocentrism can provide grounds against any form of exploitation.

- Between self-interest and reverence stands the pathway of relational ethics

But the two models don't necessarily have to be adversarial to one another. An increasing number of ecological philosophies propose the potential for ethical pluralism—a middle path in which human interest and non-human values are weighed. The idea of “enlightened anthropocentrism” suggests that we can protect the environment both because it benefits humans and because it has value on its own. In this view, caring for nature out of human interest doesn't have to ignore its deeper, inherent worth. In the same way, some non-anthropocentric philosophers, including Val Plumwood, have contended that re-placing the human in nature merely does not eliminate our special moral agency.

Summarized Overview

This unit has traced one of the most significant philosophical tensions in environmental ethics: between anthropocentrism and non-anthropocentrism. We began with the historical supremacy of human-centric ethical systems and traced the evolution of how contemporary ecological crises have triggered a revolutionary reconsideration of the human-nature relationship. Anthropocentrism, in its focus on human interests and rational mastery, is a utilitarian model for environmental politics but threatens to entrench hierarchical dualisms that exclude the non-human world. Non-anthropocentric ethics, however, is a metaphysical and ethical transformation, based on ecological interdependence. It attempts to confer intrinsic value on all living things, even on non-living things by expanding the circle of moral concern. But this development has its complexities such as moral overextension, idealisation of nature, and practical challenges. The tension between these approaches indicates that the future may not be for one or the other, but it would be in establishing a dialogical ethic. An environmentally mature ethical consciousness must keep our human interests in balance with the integrity of the non-human world.

Self-Assessment

1. How does the anthropocentric view shape our understanding of environmental responsibility?
2. Can non-anthropocentrism justify legal rights for rivers or mountains? Why or why not?
3. What role do indigenous cultural traditions play in shaping non-anthropocentric ethics?
4. Is there an inherent tension between development goals and ecological ethics?

Assignments

1. Critically evaluate the philosophical foundations of anthropocentrism. In what ways has it contributed to both environmental degradation and conservation strategies?
2. Discuss the strengths and limitations of non-anthropocentric environmentalism.
3. Compare and contrast anthropocentric and non-anthropocentric frameworks with illustrations from ecological policies or indigenous practices.
4. Analyse how Vedantic philosophy could contribute to bridging the gap between anthropocentric and non-anthropocentric ethics.
5. Reflect on your own ecological values. To what extent are they shaped by anthropocentric assumptions?

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BLOCK 2
Non-Anthropocentric
Approaches to
Environmental Ethics

UNIT 1

Consequentialism (Sentientism): Preference Utilitarianism of Peter Singer

Learning Outcomes

After the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- understand the core principles of consequentialist ethics in relation to environmental concerns
- distinguish between classical utilitarianism and Peter Singer's preference utilitarianism
- critically analyse Singer's contribution to animal ethics and environmental philosophy
- apply non-anthropocentric ethical reasoning to animal welfare dilemmas

Background

The creation of environmental ethics as a distinct discipline represented not merely a new series of concerns, but a new ethical trajectory. Philosophers began to ponder: What if the morally significant were more than human? What must serve as criteria, if not being a member of a species, for being of moral concern? In the midst of this paradigm shift, consequentialist ethics provided a compelling model. Contrasting with deontological explanations that base morality on duty or rule, consequentialism judges actions on their consequences. This model was particularly well-suited to the environmental context, where action tends to impact complex, interdependent webs of life. Amidst this larger school of ethics, a new voice came into prominence—Peter Singer—whose arguments essentially shook traditional moral boundaries. Singer's book, *Animal Liberation*, responded to the moral exclusion of animals not by invoking rights, but by a new version of utilitarianism. Singer first reformulated the basis of moral considerability on the grounds of sentience, being capable of suffering or enjoying. This was a very big break with anthropocentric ethics and with the older utilitarian emphasis on pleasure. Secondly, he developed preference utilitarianism, a version of traditional utilitarianism that judges actions by how well they satisfy the preferences of those

affected, rather than just focusing on pleasure or pain. Singer's work is a keystone in what is now seen as a non-anthropocentric ethical tradition in this context. His moral argument allowed us to speak seriously of the interests of animals and thereby of the ecosystems they are a part of. Singer's position does not find nature sacred or ecosystems as moral agents in themselves; instead, it requires that actions take into account the experiential existence of all sentient beings. The unit presents Singer's ethical theory in this consequentialist tradition. We will trace the tradition from classical utilitarianism to Singer's preference-based theory, survey his anti-speciesism argument, and discuss the practical and philosophical implications of the environmental sphere.

Keywords

Sentientism, Preference Utilitarianism, Speciesism, Consequentialism, Moral Considerability, Non-Anthropocentrism

Discussion

2.1.1 From Classical to Contemporary Utilitarianism

Utilitarianism, as first stated by Jeremy Bentham and later developed by John Stuart Mill, evaluates actions in terms of the utility principle. The right action is the one that produces the greatest overall happiness (or pleasure) and the least overall suffering (or pain) for the greatest number of people. For Bentham, "nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure." This means he believed that all moral decisions could be made by calculating the amount of pleasure and pain an action would produce—almost like doing a kind of moral arithmetic, adding up the good and bad effects to decide what is right. Mill added differences of quality, asserting intellectual pleasures were superior to mere physical pleasures. Both philosophers grounded moral status firmly in the human world.

- Classical utilitarianism of Bentham and Mill

Peter Singer builds on the tradition of utilitarianism but takes it beyond its original anthropocentric focus. Drawing on Jeremy Bentham's idea that animals can suffer and should not be ignored morally, Singer argues that what really matters in ethics is sentience—the ability to feel pain and pleasure. He believes that being able to think, speak, or even belong to a particular species is not what makes a being morally important. Singer says that if a creature can suffer or enjoy life, it deserves moral consideration. This idea is called sentientism.

- Singer's sentientism re-describes classic utilitarianism



2.1.2 Sentientism and the Expansion of the Moral Circle

Peter Singer's sentientism represents a paradigm shift in moral philosophy in which the ability to feel, instead of belonging to a particular species, is the central consideration for moral concern. Singer expands on Jeremy Bentham's well-known question, "Can they suffer?" to construct a moral system. Singer regards the basis of the anthropocentric attitude as an irrational bias, and he calls it speciesism. Just as discrimination against other characteristics such as gender or race, speciesism is also grounded on morally irrelevant differences such as biological classification rather than morally relevant factors like the ability to feel pain or have preferences.

- Belonging to a species is morally arbitrary

The analogy of racism/sexism is utilised by Singer for the purpose of demonstrating the irrationality of speciesism. Just as we reject the idea that someone's interests can be ignored simply because of their gender or race, we should also reject the idea that a being's interests can be ignored just because it is of a different species or kind. In other words, moral worth should not depend on what kind of being someone is, but whether they have interests that matter. The morally relevant consideration is sentience: the ability to suffer, to feel, to prefer, and to avoid pain. A pig, for example, might not have the capacity for complex arithmetic, but if the pig can experience fear and harm in a slaughterhouse, then the pain and fear are ethically important. Singer's system does not presuppose equal treatment, but equal consideration.

- Equal suffering receives equal moral consideration, distinctions on species aside

This response undermines the habitual practices of everyday life. Industrial agriculture, for instance, causes immense suffering to billions of animals annually. This is not because their interests do not count, but because their suffering is held to be morally irrelevant compared to human wants for inexpensive meat. Peter Singer argues that accepting this kind of suffering requires using a double standard: we treat similar suffering differently just because the beings involved are not human. But this goes against the core idea of utilitarian ethics, which is based on impartiality, the belief that all suffering should be considered equally, no matter who experiences it. According to Peter Singer, the common human habit of giving animals little or no moral importance is not the result of careful ethical thinking. It comes from cultural conditioning, convenience, and self-interest. People are taught from an early age to view

- Disregard of animal suffering is a sign of convenience rather than moral consistency

animals as less significant, and this view is reinforced because it suits human lifestyles and industries. However, treating animals with moral concern is not about being emotional or overly sentimental. It's simply the logical outcome of being morally consistent. If we truly believe in fairness and in reducing suffering, then we must extend our moral concern to all beings who can suffer—not just humans.

- Environmental devastation is a moral imperative when sentient lives are involved

In addition, sentientism offers a philosophical basis to extend ethical concern from particular animals to systems that impact their lives. For example, environmental destruction is not only an ecological concern—it's a moral concern when it creates throngs of suffering for sentient life. The destruction of ecosystems through forest loss destroys habitat and also displaces and harms countless animals whose lives are organised around such a setting. Climate change is not only an issue for future generations of human life, but for current nonhuman species already suffering its impact. Singer's ethical theory, based on sentientism, asks us to consider seriously the suffering of such animals as an intrinsic moral issue.

- Sentientism reframes ethics as a nonhuman-inclusive moral vision

Practically, sentientism leads us to rethink policy, ways of life, and institutional design. From what we eat to what we know, from wildlife management to environmental policy, Singer's method insists that we should ask, "Whose pain or flourishing is it affecting?" It de-centres the human from the moral universe and brings all feeling creatures into the discussion. This has profound implications, not only for animal rights activism but also for constructing an environmental ethic that is inclusive and consistent with the reality of interspecies suffering.

2.1.3 Preference Utilitarianism: A Subtle Shift

- Right action is that which honours and satisfies the preferences of all sentient beings

We saw that Peter Singer's utilitarianism is new since it diverges from traditional hedonistic utilitarianism, for which the sole aim is to produce the most pleasure and less pain. Instead, Singer champions a preference utilitarianism whereby the best act is one that maximally satisfies the interests or preferences of everyone involved. Here, the deviation is very little but important. While pleasure and pain are obviously significant, Singer maintains that from the moral point of view, most important is the satisfaction of the consciously entertained preferences of a being, which may or could be separable from



simple sensory pleasure. This makes his theory uphold people's autonomy, both human and nonhuman, by seriously considering their stated or evident interests.

- Preference utilitarianism respects the moral gravity of long-standing interests

Preference utilitarianism is especially powerful when we apply it to beings with complex mental and emotional lives. For instance, a human being doesn't just want brief moments of pleasure; they usually prefer to live a long, healthy life with purpose and minimal pain. This kind of long-term preference is harder to explain using classical utilitarianism, which only looks at the amount of pleasure and pain an action causes. But Peter Singer's approach, preference utilitarianism, goes further. It allows us to consider deeper desires, such as the wish to continue living, to connect with others, to complete goals, or simply to exist. These preferences matter morally. It also affects how we treat animals. Even though their preferences may be less complex than ours, many animals still show clear desires to avoid pain, to feel safe, and to stay with companions. According to Singer, those preferences also deserve respect and consideration.

- Moral choices have to balance the preferences of all of us, not ours alone

Peter Singer's moral theory is based on impartiality. This means that a person making a moral decision must put aside their own desires and consider the preferences of all beings affected, treating them as equally important. This idea is similar to the utilitarian principle of achieving the greatest good for the greatest number, but focuses on maximising the satisfaction of everyone's preferences. The key question is not whether I personally benefit from an outcome, but whether the outcome best satisfies the wants and needs of all sentient beings. Because of this, a preference utilitarian would reject actions or practices that may benefit some but violate the important preferences of others. For example, intensive farming might please many humans who enjoy cheap meat, but it deeply harms animals by ignoring their basic interests to avoid suffering and to live freely.

- Only morally deserving preferences are considered in the calculation

Singer says that not all preferences are equally important. For example, a person's cruel wish to hurt another being is not the same as that being's wish to avoid pain or stay alive. Some preferences are selfish, harmful, or based on ignorance. These do not deserve the same moral respect as preferences that protect life and prevent suffering. So, in preference utilitarianism, we must look at which preferences are fair and reasonable, not just how many people have them. Bad or harmful preferences can

be rejected, especially if they cause unnecessary pain. This makes Singer's theory strong. It focuses on the real needs and interests of living beings. Because of this, Singer can defend important causes like animal rights, fighting poverty, and protecting the environment.

- Sentience, and not species, is the ethical test

One of the most effective uses of preference utilitarianism by Singer is in animal ethics. Animals, though they may not be able to express preferences vocally, unequivocally show behavioural indicators of preference, e.g., aversion to pain, seeking comfort, socialisation, etc. When animals possess self-awareness, like some primates or dolphins, their desire to stay alive can be extreme. For Singer, to disregard such preferences is unjust and morally wrong. On this ground, methods such as factory farming, animal research, and land destruction become morally wrong, not because animals are "like us," but because their interests count in themselves.

- Distance, species, or time should not dissipate our ethical responsibility

Singer's preference utilitarianism also makes the ethical imperative to eliminate world poverty and environmental devastation more compelling. If the good of a foreigner is as important as the suffering of someone nearby, then ignoring their needs is morally wrong. The same goes for ecosystems and animals. This makes Singer's stance fundamentally equalitarian: geography, species, or distance in time can never become the excuse for inaction regarding ethics.

2.1.4 Environmental Ethics and Animal Liberation

- Animal liberation is not clemency

Animal Liberation (1975) by Singer is not only a call to action for animals' rights but a classic book that changed the direction of moral philosophy and environmental discourse as well. In Animal Liberation, Singer used his preference utilitarianism to demonstrate the obvious inconsistency in our treatment of nonhuman animals within institutions like experimental laboratories and entertainment. If we are concerned with reducing pain and honouring preferences, then these industries are wrong on ethical grounds. The book redirected the argument; to be ethical toward animals is not a function of being soft-hearted but of being morally consistent in thinking.

His ideas also counter instrumentalist environmentalism, which aims to legitimise the conservation of nature only for

- Nature is not just useful to us—it is full of lives that matter morally

the sake of the advantages it brings to human beings, such as clean air, water, or views. For Singer, this strategy does not take seriously the moral concern of nonhuman animals and can lead to speciesism. A forest is not merely a “resource” or “carbon sink,” but a home full of sentient lives with interests in thriving, security, and social connection. Preference utilitarianism requires that these interests be taken into account in moral assessment, irrespective of their utility to human endeavours.

- Personal ethics must respond to and reverse systemic moral breakdowns

Singer’s book links personal lifestyle decisions to institutional ethical responsibilities. Abstaining from animal products, for instance, is not presented as a simple individualistic act of virtue, but as a rational reaction to unjust institutions that harm sentient interests. This situates environmental ethics within the realm of social and political activism, connecting dietary ethics, climate justice, and institutional responsibility. Thus, Singer’s philosophy avoids the artificial dichotomies between personal ethics and collective responsibility, demanding that ethical coherence be enforced at every level of activity.

- Environmental ethics must care about sentient well-being

By relocating the focus from ecosystems to individual experience, Singer challenges a radical rethinking of the shape of environmental ethics. His theory demands that environmental decision-making in policy, law, or activism place at their centre the preferences and suffering of sentient creatures. It also poses conservation questions differently: if the preservation of an organism will involve intolerable suffering of sentient creatures, then that equation needs to be rigorously tested. Ethical examination cannot sentimentalise “natural order” if avoidable suffering is part of the deal.

2.1.5 Criticisms and Limitations

- Measurement of preferences can be inaccurate and unreliable and hence not practical for ethics

Although Singer’s preference utilitarianism and sentientism have had a tremendous impact, they have not been immune to criticism. One of the most significant criticisms is that it is difficult to quantify preferences. Although pain or pleasure can be quantified in terms of bodily reactions or behavioural indicators, preferences are subjective and frequently hard to quantify. This raises issues regarding the consistency and dependability of moral calculations based on preferences, especially when disparate preferences differ. For example, what if a human preference to test on animals goes against an animal preference not to suffer in an experiment? This issue makes preference utilitarianism problematic, particularly when applied on a large scale in institutional or global settings.

- Preference utilitarianism is faced with problems when there are no animals who can have determinate preferences

- Autonomy and rationality could unjustly exclude vulnerable beings from consideration

- Preference utilitarianism is unconcerned with the inherent value of ecosystems.

Furthermore, preference utilitarianism is also faulty as it does not adequately address the moral status of entities that cannot express preferences, e.g., infants, profoundly cognitively impaired persons, or nonhuman animals that cannot perform the cognitive complexity to set or express definite preferences.

Another limitation of Singer's model is the potential for an overdependence on rationality and autonomy. Preference utilitarianism tends to favour beings who can clearly express what they want. This can be a problem because it might ignore the moral value of those who can't express their preferences, like people with severe mental disabilities or animals. Even if these beings suffer greatly, they might be left out of moral concern simply because they can't think or communicate like others. If moral worth is based only on thinking ability, then the most vulnerable beings may be unfairly excluded from moral care.

Lastly, environmental ethicists argue that preference utilitarianism cannot adequately capture the rich intrinsic value of ecosystems. Even as Singer's approach is sensitive to the pain and preferences of conscious animals, it fails to regard the worth of ecosystems as a whole. Those animals without preference-expression capacities, such as plants, insects, or microorganisms, fall short. Therefore, preference utilitarianism could be not aptly attuned to the ecosystem that is environmentally based and constructs the biosphere.

Summarized Overview

In this unit, we have seen Peter Singer's preference utilitarianism as a deep extension of classical utilitarian theory to maximise the satisfaction of preferences for all sentient beings irrespective of their species. Singer's transition from hedonistic to preference utilitarianism is a key development in moral philosophy that enables us to understand moral agency and suffering better. By requiring that human and nonhuman individuals' preferences are to be the basis of ethical decision-making, Singer redirects our understanding of animal ethics and environmental ethics to show that moral concern is not merely with pleasure and pain, but with the satisfaction of interests and desires. While his theory has provided firm foundations for animal liberation and ecological ethics, it has been criticised, particularly for its reliance on subjective preferences, difficulty in aggregating conflicting interests, and its potential lack of consideration for beings that are incapable of expressing preferences. These being the case, Singer's preference utilitarianism is nonetheless a new morality that necessitates new fences to be jumped in the ethics of our treatment of animals, nature, and how individual



tastes are so heavily morally balanced. It opens up new horizons of theory as well as argumentation to apply to practice on behalf of social justice, animal welfare rights, and ecological sustainability.

Self-Assessment

1. What is the central tenet of Peter Singer's preference utilitarianism?
2. Explain how preference utilitarianism addresses the moral status of nonhuman animals.
3. In what ways does Singer's ethical framework extend to environmental ethics? Provide an example.
4. What are the main criticisms of preference utilitarianism?
5. How does preference utilitarianism apply to moral decision-making in situations where human and animal interests conflict?

Assignments

1. Analyse how Peter Singer's preference utilitarianism provides a new perspective on animal rights. In your analysis, consider the ethical implications of treating animals as moral equals to humans in terms of preferences.
2. Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of applying preference utilitarianism to environmental ethics. How does this framework help address issues like deforestation and species extinction?
3. How does preference utilitarianism deal with conflicts between preferences?
4. Compare and contrast Peter Singer's preference utilitarianism with another ethical theory (e.g., deontology or virtue ethics).
5. Discuss the limitations of preference utilitarianism in addressing the intrinsic value of ecosystems and non-sentient beings.
6. How can preference utilitarianism inform policy-making regarding animal welfare and environmental conservation? Provide practical examples of how this framework could influence legislation.

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SGOU

UNIT 2

Deontology / Bio-Centrism: The Ethics of Respect for Nature

Learning Outcomes

After the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- explain the fundamental principles of deontological ethics and bio-centrism.
- understand how respect for nature is integral to bio-centric ethical frameworks.
- critically assess the ethical implications of extending moral consideration to nonhuman entities.
- compare bio-centrism with anthropocentric and sentientist ethical theories.
- apply deontological and bio-centric ethical frameworks to real-world environmental issues.

Background

A profound transformation in ethical thinking emerged with the advent of deontological ethics and bio-centrism, the two philosophies underlying ethical consideration for nonhuman nature and the inherent value of the natural world. Deontology is a school of ethics best known from Immanuel Kant, having to do with the dignity of moral duty and obligation based on reason. Kantian ethics is based on the concept of the categorical imperative, the idea that one should act in ways that would be universalisable. Kant himself never applied moral obligation to animals or nature, but deontologists have now taken Kant's philosophy and used it to develop the position that humans owe nature a debt, even when there is no direct human interest at stake. In contrast, bio-centrism is a new ethical theory that demands that all forms of life, whether they are useful or significant to human purposes, possess intrinsic value. The bio-centric perspective informs that human beings are simply part of an extended ecological community and that we must take an ethical stance of respect for nature and acknowledge that human beings are not the ultimate standard of all value. This unit will explain how the two systems of ethics—deontology and bio-centrism—present effective solutions to environmental ethics.



Keywords

Deontology, Bio-Centrism, Intrinsic Value, Ethical Duty, Kantian Ethics, Nonhuman Life, Ecosystem Integrity

Discussion

2.2.1 Deontological Ethics and Its Application to Environmental Ethics

Deontological ethics, as developed by Immanuel Kant, is based on the principle that morality is an inventory of duties and obligations determined by reason, not the consequences of actions. Kant's categorical imperative states that we should act in a manner that we can rationally will that all other individuals should do the same. In this model, an act is right provided it conforms to a set of principles that all would will. While Kant was concerned with human dignity and rationality, contemporary deontologists have attempted to apply his theory to nature, claiming that human beings have a moral duty to preserve and save nature. This regard for nature is a natural extension of Kant's duty ethics. As moral agents, we must act in compliance with laws that respect the inherent value of all things in nature.

- Deontological ethics offers a rational, duty-based method

Kant's initial paradigm left nonhuman animals outside of the moral community of respect since Kant thought animals, being irrational, could never have the dignity that humans possess. This drew from Kant's belief that one should only incorporate those who have the ability to exercise reason within the moral threshold. But modern deontologists have reinterpreted Kant's position and stated that even though animals lack reason, they ought to be treated with moral respect for their ability to suffer, position in nature, and human moral obligation toward all living things. Therefore, deontological theory of ethics has come to be interpreted that humans owe a responsibility of respect towards nature and living things within it, owing to the moral law that covers all rational entities.

- Deontological ethics fills gaps in Kant's initial contribution

- Deontology embraces the fact that moral obligation transcends human society to the natural world

In environmental ethics, this deontological addition prompts action to protect the environment due to human moral obligations to behave in manners that protect the dignity and inherent worth of nature. The responsibility to conserve systems is ingrained in the moral law, and the responsibility exists regardless of whether or not human beings directly reap a

personal gain from maintaining the systems. The deontological obligation to act can be considered universal, to both human society and the world in general.

2.2.2 Bio-Centrism and Respect for Nature

Bio-centrism, as a theory, asserts that all living things, such as plants, animals, and microorganisms, possess inherent value irrespective of their usefulness to human beings. This view rejects anthropocentric ethical theories, which prioritise human interests and needs above other organisms. Bio-centrism contends that life itself, in whatever form, possesses moral status and ought to be treated and respected. The moral community of life includes not just sentient life capable of experiencing pleasure and pain but also non-sentient forms of life, like plants and ecosystems, which are valuable in themselves for their contribution to the balance and integrity of the natural order.

- Bio-centrism redirects the ethical focus from human needs to the inherent value of all forms of life

- Bio-centrism invites us to commit to the preservation of ecosystems

- Bio-centrism promotes an integrative approach

- Bio-centrism is unable to resolve human interests and environmental conservation conflicts

The underlying presumption of bio-centrism is that human beings are not the ultimate measure of value in the universe, and that there are moral duties to all kinds of life. According to this perspective, human beings should take a humble stance towards nature, acknowledging that the health of the natural world is not only the prerequisite for the survival of human beings but also has inherent value.

A bio-centric approach to ethics calls for the maintenance of biodiversity and the conservation of habitats and species because these contribute to the integrity and health of the environment. This approach results in a profound respect for nature, implying that human beings have a moral obligation to conserve nature for nature's intrinsic value. From a bio-centric perspective, the moral concern for nature transcends the human species, building a wider moral community of life.

2.2.3 Criticisms and Challenges to Bio-Centrism

Even though bio-centrism presents a compelling alternative to anthropocentric approaches, it is severely criticised. Perhaps a major criticism is that bio-centric ethics can be unrealistic to implement, particularly when there is a tension between human need and environmental conservation. For instance, where there is economic expansion or survival at issue, bio-centrism's emphasis on the intrinsic worth of nonhuman lives can appear unrealistic or unworkable. Where a natural habitat loss may

result in human prosperity or poverty alleviation, bio-centrism fails to provide straightforward guidance on how to balance these competing interests.

- The moral position of non-sentient life remains a controversial issue in bio-centrism

Another charge against bio-centrism is that the moral status of non-sentient beings can be problematic. While bio-centrism assigns moral value to plants, ecosystems, and other non-sentient things, it will be hard to quantify the specific moral weight such things should carry over sentient things capable of experiencing pleasure and pain. Such moral uncertainty poses questions about how to balance competing claims to moral consideration when ecological systems or species play various roles and have varying values in ecological systems. For example, assigning moral value to non-sentient life forms like plants, bacteria, or fungi raises serious doubts. These beings cannot feel pleasure or pain, and their moral claims are hard to weigh against those of sentient beings. This creates confusion in ethical decision-making.

- Equality of each life or the best for the environment as a whole?

Another problem with bio-centrism is that it focuses too much on individual living beings, rather than looking at the bigger picture. Bio-centrism says that every living thing, whether it's a tree, a fish, or an insect, has moral value and should be protected. But sometimes, to protect the health of an entire ecosystem, we may need to control certain species. For example, if an invasive water plant is harming a pond, removing it might help the whole ecosystem survive. Eco-centric views that care about the whole system, like forests, rivers, and species together, would support such actions. But bio-centrism would see this as morally wrong because it harms individual life forms. This creates a conflict.

2.2.4 Can Deontology and Bio-Centrism Be Combined into One Ethical Approach?

- Deontology's Duty and Bio-Centrism's Value

Deontology teaches that humans, as rational beings, have clear duties to act morally—not only toward other people but also toward all living things if we extend our sense of duty. This means respecting animals, plants, and ecosystems. Bio-centrism supports this by saying all life has value just because it exists, no matter if it's useful to humans or not. Together, they create a strong ethical base: deontology tells us how we should act, and bio-centrism shows who deserves our moral respect. For example, the duty to avoid causing harm fits well with bio-centrism's idea that animals and plants should be protected simply because they live.

- A Complementary Ethical Framework

When we combine these two ideas, they help balance each other. Deontology gives clear rules, like the duty not to lie or harm others, which helps us decide what is right. Bio-centrism widens our care to all living things, encouraging respect for the whole natural world. Together, this helps us think about real problems: for example, recognising animals have value and having a duty not to hurt them supports animal rights and opposes things like factory farming. It also supports protecting the environment, like saving endangered species or forests, by linking the value of nature with our duty to keep it safe for future generations.

- Challenges in Applying the Synthesis

However, this combined approach can face problems. Sometimes, duties to protect nature clash with human needs. For example, creating more farmland to feed more people might harm animal habitats. This can cause conflict between saving nature and helping people. Also, it can be hard to apply strict moral duties in tricky situations. For instance, removing invasive species might protect an ecosystem as a whole, but can harm individual animals. This shows that while the combined view is strong, using it in real life needs careful thinking, judgment, and sometimes tough choices.

Summarized Overview

The ethical response to environmental issues cannot be limited to anthropocentric concerns alone. It must evolve into a framework that takes the value and dignity of all forms of life seriously. This unit explored how deontological ethics and bio-centric philosophy—despite their different philosophical origins—can together contribute to the emergence of a robust environmental ethic. Deontological ethics, with its grounding in duty and universal moral law, lays a foundational claim that human beings, as moral agents, are obligated to respect not just other humans but all beings capable of being affected by our actions. While traditional deontology often restricts moral standing to rational agents, the application of its core principle of duty can be extended to include moral obligations toward nonhuman entities, particularly when informed by ecological awareness. Bio-centrism, on the other hand, radically departs from human-centred moral hierarchies and assigns intrinsic value to all living organisms, irrespective of their utility or proximity to human characteristics. It challenges the idea that moral worth depends on rationality or sentience and instead affirms that being alive is itself a sufficient basis for moral consideration. By integrating the moral rigour of deontological thinking with the inclusive moral horizon of bio-centrism, we arrive at a more holistic vision, where environmental ethics is no longer a matter of choice or sentiment, but a necessary extension of moral justice. This combined ethical approach has not only theoretical merit but practical relevance for shaping personal attitudes, legal policies, and collective environmental practices.



Self-Assessment

1. What is the central claim of deontological ethics in relation to environmental responsibility?
2. How does bio-centrism differ from anthropocentric views of nature?
3. In what way can deontological ethics be extended beyond human beings?
4. What is meant by the 'inherent value' of all living organisms in bio-centric thought?
5. How does the synthesis of deontology and bio-centrism provide a stronger ethical foundation?

Assignments

1. Discuss how Kantian deontology can be interpreted to support environmental ethics.
2. Compare and contrast the principles of anthropocentrism and bio-centrism.
3. Explain the concept of inherent worth in bio-centrism with examples.
4. Critically examine the strengths and weaknesses of deontological approaches in environmental ethics.
5. How can a combined framework of deontological and bio-centric ethics contribute to policy-making and ecological conservation?
6. Do you think reverence for life can be a sufficient moral guide in times of ecological crisis? Substantiate your answer with philosophical reasoning.

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UNIT 3

Eco-Centric Approach, Holistic Approach, Land Ethic of Aldo Leopold

Learning Outcomes

After the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- understand eco-centrism, holism, and the land ethic
- explain the difference between human-centred, life-centred, and eco-centred views on the environment.
- think about the importance of seeing nature as a whole
- use eco-centric ideas to address real-world environmental problems. Reflect on the implications of both approaches for contemporary environmental policymaking and ecological justice.

Background

Ecocentrism rejects both the narrow focus on individual human beings and the limited moral scope of animal-centred biocentrism. It promotes a broader ecological awareness by asserting that *wholes* such as ecosystems, biotic communities, and ecological processes deserve moral attention in their own right. This shift toward ecological holism arose from a growing awareness of the interdependence and systemic character of natural environments. Ecocentrism emphasizes that the natural world should not be seen merely as a collection of individual life forms, but as an interconnected web where the value of each part is related to its role within the whole. Among the early champions of this vision, Aldo Leopold stands out as a foundational figure. His work “A Sand County Almanac” (1949) introduced what came to be known as the land ethic, a groundbreaking ethical framework rooted in ecological thinking. Leopold’s ethic famously states: “A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.” This statement

marked a decisive move away from human-centred ethics and toward a view in which entire ecosystems hold intrinsic value. Leopold's emphasis on ecological citizenship—the idea that humans are *plain members and citizens of the land community*—challenged dominant narratives of environmental mastery and control. In doing so, he laid the groundwork for contemporary ecocentric ethics, blending scientific ecology with moral philosophy. Leopold's legacy continues to remain central to environmental philosophy.

Keywords

Eco-centrism, Holism, Land Ethic, Aldo Leopold, Biotic Community, Ecosystem Integrity

Discussion

2.3.1 Main Principles of the Eco-Centric Approach

Eco-centrism is actually a paradigm shift that attributes moral significance to ecosystems, ecological processes, and the integrity of the biosphere as a whole. It is a response to a critical critique of the shortcomings of anthropocentric and bio-centric ethics, which are individualistic in their focus. Eco-centric ethics hold that nature has value in and of itself—that is, it is valuable regardless of its utility or connection to human wants. That is, forest destruction, species depletion, or river pollution are not just issues because they hurt humans, but because they harm the web of value of nature in and of itself.

- Nature is valuable regardless of its use

- Embeddedness in ecological networks is the origin of ethical action

Eco-centric theories also require interdependence of life systems and hold that ethical decisions need to be sensitive to the holistic effect on ecological wholes. This includes acknowledgment of value in energy flow, nutrient cycling, support for biodiversity, and nature's resilience. By taking ecosystems rather than individuals or species as the unit of moral consideration, eco-centrism permits a wider and more systemic assessment of actions. It leads humans to realise their situatedness within webs of ecology, not as grand managers, but as a co-evolving component of an inalienably connected totality.



2.3.2 The Holistic Turn in Environmental Ethics

- Holism regards systems as greater than their components

The holistic turn in environmental ethics completes and extends the eco-centric way of thinking. Holism argues that wholes have properties and values not derivable from the sum of the parts. This emergentist philosophical idea added significance in ecological philosophy, where the health and integrity of an ecosystem are built up through the interdependency between its abiotic and biotic constituents. Conservation must thus not be based on the protection of individual species or particular habitats but must deal with the larger dynamic systems in which these are part.

- Ecological problems need holistic ethical systems

Integrated environmental ethics redefines human interaction with nature as part of a complex whole. Instead of breaking down ecological problems into manageable bits, it demands an integrated understanding of landscapes, processes, and interrelationships. The loss of pollinators, for example, cannot be seen simply as an agricultural threat but as a symptom of larger system disequilibrium involving pesticides and habitat destruction.

- Holism combines science, spirituality, and ethics

Holism is also in opposition to reductionist science that quantifies variables and ignores context. While it's important to be scientifically accurate, ethical decisions about the environment also need to consider things like how ecosystems bounce back, reach critical limits, or suddenly change. Such an ethical framework should also be aligned with indigenous epistemologies. Many of these epistemologies understand the environment as an interconnected wholeness that has spirituality. Holism thereby not only transforms ecological science and ethics but incorporates cultural interpretations of nature.

- Leopold broadens ethics to encompass the land community

2.3.3 Aldo Leopold's Land Ethic

Aldo Leopold's land ethic is a milestone in the development of contemporary environmental philosophy. Ethics, for him, has to be designed to include not only interpersonal and social relationships but also the human relationship with nature. The land, as Leopold puts it, is not soil or terrain. It is an interrelated community of lives and systems, consisting of water, air, plants, animals, and human beings. This central tenet provides us with a rich moral compass based on ecological reality.

- Ecological thinking is thinking in wider time and space

Leopold's moral vision is science-dependent ecology. At the same time, it expresses a profound respect for nature. His prose in *A Sand County Almanac* combines observation with philosophical understanding. Land is not an object of utility, but an object of moral concern. He invites human beings to "think like a mountain" as a metaphor for adopting long-term, systemic thinking that takes consequences into account over space and time.

- Humans are ethical participants in the land community

Leopold introduces the idea that human beings are not separate from the natural world, but ethical members of a larger biotic community. In this community, we are neither conquerors who dominate nature nor passive spectators who merely observe it. Instead, we are participants. Our actions influence the land, and in turn, the land shapes our experiences and behaviours. This view invites a shift from viewing conservation as a set of legal duties to embracing a personal, moral relationship with the environment. It encourages humility, responsibility, and a sense of belonging within the natural world. Leopold's vision laid the groundwork for modern movements such as rewilding (restoring natural ecosystems), community-based conservation (where local people take active roles in protecting their surroundings), and land-based identity (a deep cultural and ethical connection to the land). All these approaches reflect his core idea: that to live ethically, humans must see themselves as part of the ecological whole, not above it.

- Eco-centrism shapes progressive environmental transformation

2.3.4 Implications and Critiques

Eco-centric and holistic philosophies have been spearheading major transformations in environmental policy, law, and public awareness. They have triggered approaches such as deep ecology, ecological justice, and rights-of-nature legislation in Ecuador and New Zealand, for instance. Such systems encourage long-term thinking, formulate sustainable models of development, and focus on human responsibility to act with foresight and ecological mindfulness. These views are framing debates in conservation, planetary health, and intergenerational justice within scholarly and activist communities.

The challenges of holism and eco-centrism must also be addressed. Some have contended that excessive focus on ecological wholes can undermine the rights and agency of individuals, particularly in human situations. For example, top-

- Collective ethics should weigh against individual rights

down ecosystem plans from systemic thinking may cause local peoples to be displaced in the name of ecosystem preservation. In regions like the Niyamgiri Hills of Odisha, plans for bauxite mining by large corporations were justified in the name of economic development and resource use. However, these projects threatened the sacred lands and forests of the Dongria Kondh tribal community. Ethical challenges come in the form of collective ecological interests over democratic participation and justice.

- In spite of resistance, eco-holistic ethics provide the paradigm change required

Critics also point out that eco-centric philosophies often suffer from conceptual vagueness. Terms such as “ecosystem health,” “stability,” and “integrity” are frequently used in loosely defined ways. Therefore, they lack precise scientific or ethical grounding. This may leave room for ideological manipulation, where policies may selectively invoke these terms to justify certain agendas while marginalising alternative viewpoints or local realities. For instance, calling an ecosystem “healthy” might ignore social injustices. In spite of these weaknesses, eco-holistic thinking is robust in that it can confront ecological crises with moral weight.

Summarized Overview

This unit has examined the philosophical foundations and ethical meaning of the eco-centric and holistic schools of environmental thinking by focusing on Aldo Leopold’s concept of *land ethic*. By transcending anthropocentric models, the eco-centric paradigm recognises ecosystems, natural processes, and non-human beings as possessing intrinsic value, worthy of moral concern in and of themselves. The holistic vision extends this vision further by grounding it in the demand that wholes are morally essential and not reducible to their parts—demanding that the integrity of ecosystems must be preserved not only for instrumental or aesthetic purposes but out of moral necessity. Aldo Leopold’s land ethic synthesises these threads by portraying human beings as members of the biotic community. His maxim that an act is right when it preserves the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community is an ethical principle for ecologically responsible action. Taken together, these strategies pose a challenge to the conventional tales of domination and exploitation. Instead, they present a relational, systemic, and humble way of approaching the larger web of life. The eco-centric and holistic models offer an essential ethical reorientation for making sense of many of the ecological crises of the present times.

Self-Assessment

1. What distinguishes the eco-centric approach from anthropocentric ethics?
2. How does the concept of intrinsic value reshape our view of nature?
3. In what ways is the holistic approach relevant to contemporary environmental challenges?
4. How does Aldo Leopold define the relationship between humans and the land community?
5. What distinguishes the eco-centric approach from bio-centric ethics?

Assignments

1. Explain the philosophical foundations of eco-centrism. How does it stand out in terms of its moral scope and ethical focus?
2. Discuss the significance of the holistic approach in understanding the integrity of ecosystems. Provide contemporary examples that illustrate holistic thinking in practice.
3. Critically evaluate Aldo Leopold's land ethic. What are its key principles, and how does it influence modern environmental philosophy and policy?
4. Analyse the challenges and critiques faced by eco-centric and holistic approaches, particularly in relation to democratic pluralism and human rights.
5. Explore the implications of considering ecosystems as moral subjects. What are the implications of including rivers, forests, or soil as part of the moral community?

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A wooden frame with a dark brown interior and a lighter brown, textured wood grain exterior. The frame is rectangular with rounded corners and four small dark knobs at the corners. The text is centered within the frame. A large, faint, light-colored watermark is visible in the background.

BLOCK 3

**Radical Approaches to
Environmental Ethics**

UNIT 1

Deep Ecology

Learning Outcomes

After the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- differentiate between shallow and deep ecology
- explain the central principles of Deep Ecology and its Eight-Point Platform
- analyse the concept of Self-realisation and the ecological Self in Deep Ecology
- assess the impact of Deep Ecology on environmental movements and activism
- critically evaluate the philosophical and practical limitations of Deep Ecology

Background

Environmental ethics made great strides in the closing decades of the 20th century when ecological degradation had become a concern and the shortcomings of traditional approaches to conservationism were being brought to the fore. All this was progressively being challenged by philosophers and activist groups as they started demanding greater, value-based solutions to environmental problems. In this time, Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess coined the term “Deep Ecology” to mark a break with conventional ecological viewpoints. In contrast to “shallow” ecology, which is a short-term policy-oriented idea, Deep Ecology focuses on a philosophical shift in the way human beings experience and act in nature. Naess aimed to affirm the inherent worth of all living beings and to dismantle the hierarchical view that places humans above nature. Influenced by systems theory and mystical cultures, Deep Ecology challenges humans to reinvent themselves as one of the members of the ecological web, not its master. Deep Ecology is oriented toward an expansion of the self beyond ego and species. It aims at a moral connectedness with the biosphere. This unit deals with Deep Ecology both as a philosophical movement and system. We will critically analyse its basic principles, explore its Eight-Point Platform, examine the ecological Self, and evaluate its impact and the criticisms it has faced.

Keywords

Biocentrism, Intrinsic Value, Self-realisation, Ecosophy, Anthropocentrism

Discussion

- Shallow ecology addresses superficial symptoms of the environmental crisis.

- Anthropocentrism still prevails.

- Deep Ecology requires a shift in how we perceive ourselves.

3.1.1 Shallow and Deep Ecology

The distinction between shallow and deep ecology was described by Arne Naess to depict two totally different responses to the ecological crisis. Shallow ecology is defined by its instrumental and pragmatic stance—it promotes environmental protection only to the point where it enhances human welfare. It encompasses measures like pollution control, resource conservation, and technological means of avoiding harm to the environment. Whereas measures of this sort are required, they typically lie within the operations and interests of existing political and economic systems.

At its core, shallow ecology does not challenge the prevailing anthropocentric worldview—the belief that nature’s primary function is to serve human needs and desires. Rather, it seeks to manage the environment more prudently to avoid disruptions to human life. This outlook, though pragmatic, stops short of engaging with more radical questions about the intrinsic value of nature, ethical responsibilities beyond human welfare, or the long-term consequences of exploiting ecosystems for short-term gain.

Deep Ecology presents, rather, a final philosophical reversal. Instead of inquiring how we might save nature for future human generations, it challenges us to reexamine the very basis of our moral connection to nature. Naess contended that environmental degradation does not result from inferior technology or policy but from a defective worldview—one that puts human beings at the centre of moral and existential attention. Deep Ecology is a plea to us to recognize the inherent value of everything, regardless of their usefulness to human beings. It’s a transformation, not a reform. It demands a change of consciousness, not a reorganisation of tools with which we deal with the environment.

The echoes of this differentiation are profound. While shallow ecology may lead to short-term benefits, such as



- Shallow ecology is reformist; deep ecology is revolutionary.

cleaner air or saved parks, Deep Ecology envisions a world in which human activity is harmonised with the greater ecological community. This movement has led numerous activists and thinkers to propose and promote ways of life and policies. Deep Ecology encourages us to be one among many, rather than one above all.

3.1.2 Arne Naess and Ecosophy

Arne Naess is a philosopher who was steeped in the empirical sciences as well as spiritual traditions. He introduced the term ecosophy in his Bucharest lecture in 1972 for the first time. It can be defined as the philosophy of ecological harmony. It is a thought of experience and values. Defined as a philosophy of ecological harmony, ecosophy reflects a deep concern for the intrinsic value of nature and emphasises the interconnectedness between humans and the environment. Drawing from Gandhi's ethics and elements of Eastern thought, Naess proposed that genuine environmental change requires not just policy reform but a personal transformation in perception and values.

- A call for personal transformation.

He used the term Ecosophy T to characterise his own, highly introspective environmental philosophy. The "T" stands for *Tvergastein*, his mountain retreat in Norway. Naess thought that each person should develop his or her own "ecosophy". Just as Naess shaped Ecosophy T from Tvergastein, an individual from India might develop an *Ecosophy H*, shaped by mountains like the Himalayas. The emphasis is not on copying Naess's ideas but on internalising ecological values through personal, reflective engagement with one's own immediate natural and cultural surroundings. Ecosophy T is not thus a dogma, but a living, developing vision which combines philosophical reflection with close ecological contact.

- Ecosophy T is a philosophy nurtured by the earth of personal reflection.

Deep relationality is one of the core principles of Ecosophy T. Naess underlined that everything is connected to and not isolated from anything else. Everything is ultimately part of a complex network of ecological relations. For this viewpoint, a mountain, a tree, a fox, and a human being are all threads in the same web of life. These connections are not superficial or mechanical, but deeply embedded in mutual dependence and dynamic interaction. Recognising this interwoven reality calls for a shift from dominance to coexistence.

- Deep relationality is embeddedness.

- The ecological Self finds no distinction between “I” and “Earth”.

This relational vision dispels the notion of a discrete, independent self and substitutes it instead with the *ecological Self*. It is a broader identity that includes all living beings as co-creators of a common life. It is a sense of identity that extends beyond the human ego to include all living beings as co-participants in a shared existence. Understanding this oneness is not a cognitive process but a realisation that re-makes one’s living, thinking, and acting.

- Inherent value of life is not instrumental.

3.1.3 The Eight-Point Platform

In 1984, Arne Naess and George Sessions codified the Eight-Point Platform upon which Deep Ecology was built, providing both a philosophical foundation and a policy blueprint for environmental activism. Formulated on behalf of environmentalists, the platform seeks to rewrite the human relation with nature to put ecological wellness and values for their own sake into ethical frontiers. The first two of the platform’s arguments allude to the acknowledgment of intrinsic value in all forms of life and ecosystems irrespective of their usefulness to humankind. By avoiding the anthropocentric model that measures nature by human requirements, Deep Ecology demands an ethical change that respects life for itself. This is opposite to conventional conservation strategies that tend towards favouring nature’s position in fulfilling human interests.

The following are the formulations of the platform as Sessions (1985) described.

1. The well-being and flourishing of human and nonhuman life on Earth have value in themselves (synonyms: intrinsic value, inherent value). These values are independent of the usefulness of the nonhuman world for human purposes.
2. Richness and diversity of life forms contribute to the realisation of these values and are also values in themselves.
3. Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy *vital* needs.
4. The flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantial decrease in the human population. The flourishing of nonhuman life requires such a decrease.
5. Present human interference with the nonhuman world is

excessive, and the situation is rapidly worsening.

6. Policies must therefore be changed. These policies affect basic economic, technological, and ideological structures. The resulting state of affairs will be deeply different from the present.
7. The ideological change is mainly that of appreciating *life quality* (dwelling in situations of inherent value) rather than adhering to an increasingly higher standard of living. There will be a profound awareness of the difference between big and great.
8. Those who subscribe to the foregoing points have an obligation directly or indirectly to try to implement the necessary changes.

The argument in the platform that follows is concerned with the significance of biological diversity. It also asserts the need to preserve intact the wealth of forms of life on Earth. Naess and Sessions presume that species diversity and ecosystem diversity help make the system as a whole ecologically stable. Humans must reinforce it instead of threatening it. The call for an immediate cut in the human population emphasises the importance of putting an end to overpopulation. It is one of the major contributors to the degradation of the environment. The manifesto condemns consumerist societies that use natural resources without any consideration of their renewability. The manifesto contends that in addressing the environment, there should be basic transformations in economic systems, technological approaches, and lifestyles. In contrast to more centrist environmental movements, Deep Ecology insists on a redefinition of progress, one gauged in terms of the health and well-being of the Earth.

- A manifesto for biodiversity.

Among the platform's most significant points is the insistence on revolutionary policy changes over environmental change. Naess and Sessions call for reconstituting political structures to prioritise ecological justice and the well-being of non-human worlds. The platform calls for ecological decentralisation, the autonomy of local communities to determine decisions immediately affecting their natural worlds. By placing emphasis on local autonomy and grassroots movements, it foresees a world in which decisions are based on deep ecological perception and not economic self-interest or immediate political advantage. The platform argues that ecological sustainability is forever out

- Emphasis on grassroots autonomy and local oversight.

of reach of small incremental change in the present systems but that a shift to more community- and holistic-governance and resource management direction is necessary.

- Real satisfaction comes from environmental balance.

The arguments of the Eight-Point Platform make an appeal for a simplification of human life, decreased material consumption, and an embrace of ecological and spiritual intelligence. It invites people to examine their own way of living and make choices that respect the earth. In promoting voluntary simplicity, it invites people to live an ecologically aware as well as spiritually satisfying way of life. It invites one actively to be part of an international ecological movement to restore harmony to the earth. These are expressions of Naess's deep faith that the destiny of the earth hangs in the balance of a spiritual and cultural revolution.

3.1.4 Self-realisation and the Ecological Self

- To realise the Self is to let go of the fantasy of separateness.

Deep Ecology is centred upon the philosophical notion of self-realisation, which is much more than straightforward individualist self-interest or mental well-being. It is partly inspired by the two Eastern schools of philosophy such as Advaita Vedanta and Mahayana Buddhism. The influence of ecological systems theory for the development of the deep ecology movement is notable. Arne Naess formulated a unique vision of the Self as deeply rooted within nature. For Naess, the egoic self, that is, a self which is most interested in personal desires, boundaries, and possessions, is a narrow self. Real self-realisation is the practice of widening one's sense of identity to include the whole environmental system.

- Self-care transforms caring for nature into an act of caring.

This expansion of the self is not merely metaphorical or poetic; it has ethical dimensions. Once one has become identified with nature to such an extent, harming the environment is no longer seen as harming something external to oneself. Environmental degradation, for example, is experienced as self-harm. The ecological Self does not act altruistically but out of an expanded and more profound sense of self-interest, redefined in terms of interdependence. This shift from ego-self to ecological Self is a good foundation for environmental ethics.

Naess's idea also overturns the Western philosophical heritage defining the Self through differentiation from others and from the world. Conversely, the ecological Self is relational



- The Self is not a fortress; it is a river of relations.

in itself. It emerges in and through relations with other beings. Rather than seeing humans as subjects facing objects, Deep Ecology sees all beings as nodes in an immense ecological web. The Self is therefore not an abiding essence but an emergent process constructed by relations, ecosystems, and evolutionary past.

- To be ecologically awakened is to become grounded in the living Earth.

Self-realisation, on the ecological level, according to deep ecology is not a refusal of the world or egotism but actually an embracing of the world. It takes being aware, attentive, and responding in a cultivated way to the earth's cycles and rhythms. It is a sense of spiritual wakefulness in which one no longer separates oneself from nature but participates intimately with nature. Most who encounter the wild or come to learn of non-human societies report a deepening sense of "coming home." Deep Ecology does not see such experience as sentimentalism but as glimpses into an integrated and more actual Self.

- Ecological Self is a model for how we must live.

Self-realisation is not an individual project. As more people experience this change of consciousness, the hope is that society will do the same. The ecological Self provides the foundation for new kinds of community, new kinds of politics, and new kinds of economic systems. The vision is not of individual ascetics in isolation but of beings in relation, engaged in the restoration of the life systems. This makes Deep Ecology a spiritual way and a call to action, in which the ecological Self is the foundation for planetary stewardship.

3.1.5 Criticism and Influence

- A too-abstract idea can threaten the very ground that it wishes to protect.

Deep ecology is not free from criticism either. One of its main criticisms is its supposed vagueness and abstraction. Environmental theorists and philosophers have maintained that the key concepts of deep ecology such as self-realisation, intrinsic value, and the ecological self are often expressed in vague ways. Thus, they cannot be operationalised into clear policy guidelines. Critics argue that without specified action imperatives, deep ecology will be a personal philosophy or spiritualism. It cannot be a successful basis for political or ecological change.

Deep Ecology has also been criticised by feminist thinkers such as Val Plumwood. They see deep ecology as having universalist tendencies. In describing a single ecological self or one undivided natural order, deep ecology sometimes

- Universalism, if unreflective, can veil more than it makes clear.

overlooks the differences in gender, race, class, and cultural comprehension. They caution against this approach erasing oppressed groups' everyday experience and knowledge bases. The idea of living in harmony with nature sounds positive, but if not clearly explained, it can cause problems. It may repeat old beliefs that link women and indigenous people more closely to nature than others. These ideas may be used to treat them as less important or less capable. So, without careful thought, this view can end up supporting unfair power structures.

- Visionary insight outside of institutional reform can get stuck at the doors of power.

Political philosophers have also been skeptical of Deep Ecology's ambiguity towards institutional politics. Although its demand for a revolution of values is compelling, critics argue that it is typically weak in providing an explanation of how this revolution could be achieved within current political structures. The movement is more centred on individual transformation of lifestyle and spiritual awakening rather than on system change because such a change involves legal reform, economic restructuring, or power redistribution. This has caused some to wonder if deep ecology can in fact deal with the magnitude of the ecological crisis.

- Idealism divorced from equity can lead to unforeseen injustice.

Another critical point is regarding the position of deep ecology on population and technology. Deep Ecology's demand for population reduction amounts to simplification of life. This has been read as eco-authoritarian. Critics worry that such advice, taken at face value, will institutionalise policies disproportionately damaging to poorer countries or underprivileged groups. Furthermore, Deep Ecology's mistrust of technological innovation is sentimental or even reactionary. As such, it does not grasp how green engineering and sustainable technology might be a part of the solution for the environmental crisis.

- Motivated various environmental movements.

Deep Ecology, however, has had a very profound impact on global environmental movements. It has inspired global environmental movements like Earth First! and the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society. Earth First! started in the United States and remains mainly active there, with smaller groups worldwide. Sea Shepherd, also founded in the U.S. and based in Friday Harbor, Washington, works internationally to protect marine life. Both groups embrace Deep Ecology's strong commitment to defending all life. It also gave rise to what Bron Taylor calls "dark green religion"—a spiritual and ethical

approach that sees nature as sacred and combines deep respect for the Earth with activism and ritual. This blend encourages people to live in harmony with the planet and fiercely protect it. Deep ecology invites us to rethink how we relate to nature and to embrace humility toward life.

Summarized Overview

Deep Ecology has been presented in this unit as a revolutionary model of environmental ethics that diverges radically from traditional, anthropocentric modes of ecological thinking. We started by distinguishing Deep Ecology from shallow ecology, the latter being a reformist model that pays attention primarily to reducing harm to the environment by means of policy, technological solutions, or conservation policies that keep nature intact mainly for human interests. In contrast, Deep Ecology demands a revolution of consciousness and values and invites human beings to see the intrinsic value of all living things regardless of their instrumental value. This strategy relies on the philosophy of Arne Naess and specifically on his definition of Ecosophy T—a personal ecological wisdom based on the interdependence of all modes of being. Naess's focus on Self-realisation and the ecological Self challenges us to break down the assumed dualism between human and nature, not out of sentimentalism, but out of profound recognition of the fact that our own well-being is inextricably linked with the well-being of the entire biosphere. This ontological transformation from ego to eco is the spiritual essence of Deep Ecology. The Eight-Point Platform, formulated by Naess and George Sessions, translates Deep Ecology's principles into an agenda of directing values for political and ethical action. It is a call not only for the preservation of ecological and biodiversity but also for human ways of life change, population stabilization, and structural change in our political and economic institutions. While these values will seem utopian or unrealistic to some, they serve as a moral compass for those wishing to bring their life into conformity with more powerful ecological values. But Deep Ecology has its flaws as well. Its abstraction, absence of political strategy, and propensity to universalise experience in ways that conceal power concerns, gender concerns, and cultural specificity concerns have been attacked by some. Feminist and social ecological thought, amongst others, have questioned whether Deep Ecology really addresses the socio-political institutions that cause ecological injustice. But even these criticisms appear to affirm the ethical power and visionary courage that Deep Ecology brings to environmental thought. Deep Ecology is less creed than invitation—inviting us to rethink ethics, to reconstruct identity, and to find again a sense of sacred belonging to the web of life. Inviting us to be less shallow, to look beyond quick fixes and to ask ourselves what it really means to live well in a more-than-human world.

Self-Assessment

1. What is the key distinction between shallow ecology and deep ecology?
2. How does Arne Naess define 'Self-realisation' in the context of deep ecology?
3. What is the philosophical foundation of the Eight-Point Platform?
4. In what ways has Deep Ecology influenced environmental movements and activism?

Assignments

1. Discuss the concept of the ecological self in deep ecology and its implications for moral responsibility toward the environment.
2. Critically evaluate the Eight-Point Platform of Deep Ecology. Do you find its principles practically applicable in contemporary environmental policy? Why or why not?
3. Compare and contrast Deep Ecology with anthropocentric environmental ethics.
4. Reflect on a personal experience where you felt a deeper connection with nature. Relate this to the idea of self-realisation described in deep ecology.

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SGOU

UNIT 2

Eco-feminism

Learning Outcomes

After the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- understand the philosophical foundations of eco-feminism and its critique of mainstream environmental ethics
- analyse the intersection between gender, ecology, and patriarchy
- differentiate between cultural eco-feminism and social eco-feminism
- evaluate the contributions of key thinkers in eco-feminism and their diverse approaches
- critically examine the relevance of eco-feminist thought in contemporary ecological movements

Background

The rise of eco-feminism during the 1970s was an important moment in the development of environmental philosophy. Built from the intersection of feminist theory and ecological awareness, eco-feminism criticised the prevailing framework of patriarchy and anthropocentrism. Eco-feminism claimed that they are the products of the oppression of women and of the degradation of the natural world. For eco-feminists, the connection between the domination of the Earth and the subordination of women is historical, material, and symbolic, not just metaphorical. Eco-feminism contends that the patriarchal dualities such as mind/body, culture/nature, male/female, human/animal have created hierarchical modes of thinking that justify domination and control. Women and nature are both reduced to the status of “Other,” and both are given as targets of systematic exploitation for the advantage of industrialism, capitalism, and masculine development. This unit discusses eco-feminism as a criticism of the traditional theories of feminism and environmental ethics. We will analyse its origin, main arguments, and diversity. We also differentiate between cultural eco-feminism, which focuses on women’s proximity



to nature, and social eco-feminism, which puts the agency of economic and political systems at the forefront. The relevance of eco-feminism today in environmental justice movements, indigenous resistance, and resistance to global capitalism is also discussed.

Keywords

Patriarchy, Dualism, Cultural Eco-feminism, Social Eco-feminism, Environmental Justice

Discussion

- Both women and nature as victims of patriarchal domination

- A radical restructuring of societal values is needed

- Cultural eco-feminism romanticises women's roles

3.2.1 The Roots of Eco-feminism

Ecofeminism emerged in response to the oppression of women and nature under patriarchal systems. Thinkers like Carolyn Merchant and Vandana Shiva argued that environmental destruction and gender inequality are not separate issues. Both stem from deep-rooted power structures that prioritise control, hierarchy, and exploitation. The rise of mechanistic thinking during the Scientific Revolution justified domination over nature by redefining it as inert and controllable. It also reinforced rigid gender roles that devalued women by portraying both nature and women as passive resources to be managed. Merchant's *The Death of Nature* showed how this shift replaced earlier views of nature as a nurturing, living force with a mechanical model.

The goal of eco-feminism is to challenge these systems, calling for a new way of relating to both the Earth and women. It critiques traditional views that value nature solely for its economic utility, arguing that the Earth, like women, deserves respect and care for its intrinsic worth. By rejecting patriarchal structures, eco-feminism calls for a radical transformation in societal values that honours interdependence over domination.

3.2.2 Eco-feminism Cultural and Social

Cultural eco-feminism focuses on women's and nature's symbolic and spiritual relationship. It traces back the roots of eco-feminism to earlier cultures where women were the guardians of earth and environment. The relationship between women and nature is best accounted for by explaining they are nurturing, caregiving, and life preservers, reinforcing the natural role of women as Earth's guardians. Cultural eco-

feminism has been critiqued for essentialism. It promotes the idea of an inherent, universal, and biologically determined connection between women and nature. This idea reduces women's identities to fixed natural roles and overlooks cultural and historical differences among women.

- Social eco-feminism seeks to confront structural injustices

Conversely, social eco-feminism is resistant to structural injustices. It highlights how capitalism and colonialism disproportionately affect women, especially women in the Global South. The Global South refers to economically and politically marginalised countries, mostly in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, having histories of colonialism and inequality. Social eco-feminists would contend that ecological concerns are not only spiritual but closely linked with relations of power and exploitation. Social eco-feminism promotes the political and economic empowerment of women because women possess vital information necessary for ecological preservation and need to be full participants in environmental decision-making.

3.2.3 Eco-feminism in Practice: Movements and Activism

- Grassroots eco-feminism reflects the power of women in saving the environment

Eco-feminism has been utilised in actual activism in grassroots movements like the Chipko Movement in India, where women embraced trees to protect them from logging. This act of resistance served as evidence of the direct connection between women's empowerment and nature protection. The Chipko Movement proved that women's survival is dependent on the sustainability of the environment in which they live.

- Latin American eco-feminist movements advocate sustainable agriculture

Feminist environmental movements in Latin America have also been concerned with the fight for the rights of rural and indigenous women victimised by environmental devastation through deforestation, expropriation of lands, and industrialised agriculture. Such movements encourage agroecology, which empowers women to participate in sustainable farming methods, defending both the environment and communities.

- Global eco-feminist networks guarantee women's voices

Across the globe, eco-feminist organisations such as WECAN (Women's Earth and Climate Action Network) call for women's inclusion in climate change discussions so that they can bring their voices to global environmental policy. They assert that climate change is a gendered phenomenon and that women, especially those from the Global South, are often the most vulnerable to its effects.



- Eco-feminism promotes economic systems that are sustainable

Eco-feminism has also influenced alternative economic theories. The important ones are degrowth, which advocates reduced production and consumption for ecological and social balance, and post-development, which challenges Western growth-driven models by promoting locally rooted, sustainable alternatives. Both approaches reject the capitalist culture of endless economic growth. Instead, they prioritise justice, care, and the well-being of both people and the planet.

3.2.4 Eco-feminism and Environmental Ethics

- Eco-feminism calls for an ethics that acknowledges the interconnection of all beings.

Eco-feminism offers a critical perspective on traditional environmental ethics by challenging the dominant, often anthropocentric, worldview that prioritises human interests above all else. Mainstream environmental ethics often regard nature as an object to be managed and preserved for human use, whereas eco-feminism calls for a fundamental shift in how we perceive our relationship with the natural world. It argues that environmental issues cannot be resolved without considering the social and cultural dimensions of power, gender, and inequality.

- Eco-feminism advocates for an inclusive environmental ethics

In eco-feminist thought, nature is not just a backdrop for human activities but a complex web of interconnected life forms that possess intrinsic value. Eco-feminists like Karen Warren and Greta Gaard stress that environmental ethics must acknowledge and address the patriarchal structures that enable environmental degradation. These structures, they argue, are deeply tied to the systemic oppression of women and marginalised communities. Environmental justice cannot be achieved without addressing the power dynamics that lead to environmental destruction and social inequity.

- Eco-feminism promotes an ethics of care

Eco-feminism aligns with non-anthropocentric ethical frameworks, such as deep ecology and biocentrism, which argue that all life forms have inherent value. Eco-feminists expand on this by incorporating gender justice into the discussion. They argue that care for the Earth, much like care for others, is an ethical obligation rooted in relationships of interdependence and respect. This calls for a more holistic approach to environmental decision-making, one that respects both the needs of the planet and the rights of its most vulnerable inhabitants.

3.2.5 Eco-feminism and the Politics of Gender

- Eco-feminism advocates for political systems that promote cooperation and ecological living.

Eco-feminism reconfigures dominant political theory by placing the highest priority on the compatibility of environmental and gender justice. Eco-feminism resists the dominant, patriarchal political culture that attempts to ignore or disqualify women's roles against pollution and ecological risks. Eco-feminist critics argue that an uneven distribution of resources, power, and decision-making mirrors the underlying reasons for gender and environmental crises. In actual attempts to tackle environmental catastrophes, eco-feminism requires the construction of care-based, participatory-oriented political cultures.

- Incorporating women's voices into environmental policy

Eco-feminist politics require the lives, worldview, and women's epistemologies to be considered in general policy-making, and especially in environmental policy-making. Women, particularly those who belong to oppressed groups, possess unique knowledge of the local environment and sustainable living due to the close relationship they share with nature. Women's knowledge of farming systems, biodiversity, and resource management has played a core role in sustaining ecological balance in rural and indigenous communities. Thus, excluding women's voices from political debate leads to mainstream environmental policy's failure to incorporate these valuable contributions.

- Eco-feminism opposes capitalist economies

The eco-feminist political change model also demands a rethinking of capitalist economic systems, which are most commonly associated with ecological destruction and social injustice. The eco-feminists hold the view that capitalism's focus on growth and profit at any cost leads to the exploitation of women and nature at the same time. The same can be said about consumerism, as it encourages non-sustainable use of resources and a focus on material wealth over human and ecological welfare. Eco-feminists propose alternative models of economies that ensure fair distribution of resources and mutual care.

3.2.6 Key Theorists and Contributions to Eco-feminism

Eco-feminism has also been supplemented through the theoretical analyses of numerous dominant theorists who have helped in expanding it, both within academia and among activists too. Some of those include the following:



- Highlights the connection between the destruction of nature and the oppression of women

Vandana Shiva is an Indian scholar, ecological activist, and anti-globalisation campaigner whose work has largely contributed to cross-linking eco-feminism to women's movements in the Global South. Her writings are critical of multinational companies destroying local knowledge systems and indigenous ecosystems. She has contended that the "Green Revolution," which brought high-yielding crop varieties and chemical pesticides, harmed women and peasants in rural India by weakening traditional agriculture. Shiva advocated seed sovereignty—the right of farmers and communities to save, use, exchange, and sell their own seeds. She also promoted ecological farming, that is, agricultural practices that work in harmony with nature by avoiding harmful chemicals and promoting biodiversity. Her work emphasises local control, biodiversity, and resistance to corporate domination of agriculture.

- Denounces the emergence of mechanistic science, which objectified nature and excluded women

Carolyn Merchant is a leading eco-feminist. Merchant's work links the history of science, specifically the mechanistic worldview that emerged from the Enlightenment, to the domination of women and nature. In *The Death of Nature*, Merchant contended that scientific rationalism and mechanistic thought had created the objectification of nature and the exclusion of women. Merchant's book is foundational in examining how philosophical, political, and scientific ideologies have contributed to environmental degradation and gendered subordination.

- Emphasizes the mutually dependent struggles of gender justice and environmental sustainability

Greta Gaard is one of the most influential eco-feminist theorists. Gaard has worked with specific emphasis on climate change struggles, reproductive rights, and indigenous self-determination. Eco-feminist movements that do not divide the question of gender from ecological issues, but rather see them as intersecting struggles, are ones that she advocates for. Ecological sustainability in the form of environmental justice is the foundation of feminist freedom, according to her.

- Advocates a postcolonial eco-feminism that resists Western exploitation

Maria Mies is a postcolonial eco-feminist. She condemns how Western capitalist ideologies have been used to colonise the Global South and impose gender and environmental inequality. Mies insists that eco-feminism has to recognise the colonial and imperial heritage in determining women's and environmental exploitation. She calls for an eco-feminist movement that is anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist, and rooted in the everyday lives of women in the Global South.

Summarized Overview

Eco-feminism provides a radical framework that connects the domination of nature to the subordination of women, both being based on patriarchal and hierarchical theory and practice systems. By establishing parallels between ecological exploitation and gender-based subordination, eco-feminism critiques the dualisms, which have traditionally characterised Western philosophical and socio-political traditions—e.g., man/woman, culture/nature, and reason/emotion. Central to eco-feminist thought is a rejection of androcentrism and anthropocentrism, both the bases upon which nature and oppressed groups are objectified and instrumentalised. Eco-feminists such as Vandana Shiva, Carolyn Merchant, Maria Mies, and Greta Gaard offer rich theoretical and practical analyses on how environmental decay and gender injustice are co-constitutive dimensions that need to be resisted collectively. The movement even challenges mainstream economic and scientific capitalism, colonialism, and mechanistic rationalism paradigms. It generates alternative care-based, relational, interdependent, and diverse—human and ecological—ethical and political paradigms. Eco-feminism is not so much inviting women into the world of nature but is rather about rethinking our whole relationship to the world and to one another. Eco-feminism envisions a world where environmental justice and gender equality blend into one, and where freedom and thriving, as well as sustainability, belong to all life.

Self-Assessment

1. What is the central claim of eco-feminism regarding the relationship between women and nature?
2. How do eco-feminist thinkers critique the anthropocentric and androcentric foundations of Western thought?
3. In what ways do capitalist and colonial ideologies contribute to both environmental degradation and gender oppression?
4. How does eco-feminism differ from mainstream environmentalism in its approach to justice?
5. Name and briefly explain the contributions of two key eco-feminist thinkers.

Assignments

1. Discuss the role of care ethics in eco-feminism.
2. Critically examine Vandana Shiva's arguments on seed sovereignty and biodiversity from an eco-feminist lens.
3. Compare eco-feminism with Deep Ecology. How do their critiques of Western science and value systems differ?
4. Select a contemporary environmental issue of your choice (e.g., water scarcity, pollution, deforestation, or industrial agriculture) and analyse it using eco-feminist principles.

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UNIT 3

Environmental Pluralism, Pragmatism and Sustainability

Learning Outcomes

After the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- differentiate between environmental pluralism and environmental pragmatism
- explain the philosophical significance of ethical diversity in addressing ecological issues
- evaluate the role of pragmatism in environmental decision-making and conflict resolution
- critically assess the strengths and limitations of pluralistic and pragmatic approaches

Background

Environmental philosophies that draw on either anthropocentrism, biocentrism, or deep ecology have identified the need to embrace plural ways of addressing the complexity of present ecological issues in ecosystems. Doing so, environmental philosophy has embraced pluralism. No single ethical system will be adequate to comprehensively cover the multi-dimensional ecological, social, and cultural nature of the problems at hand. Pluralism brings many voices, values, and traditions into ethical consideration, which paves the way for inclusiveness and flexibility. Simultaneously, environmental pragmatism, as a method stressing pragmatic ends over ideological purity, has emerged. Pragmatism rejects ideological purity and instead values context-sensitive, democratic debate that can culminate in reaching good environmental policy. In the philosophical tradition of William James and John Dewey, environmental pragmatism assumes ethics to be experimental and emergent. It should be constantly revisable in light of practical results. These age-old intellectual streams meet in the modern concern with sustainability. Sustainability, as a destination and as a regulative ethic, demands long-term consideration, communal governance, and attention to justice over generations. This unit is focused on tracing the intersections of environmental pluralism, pragmatism, and sustainability to understand a more holistic and dynamic ethical response to ecological issues.

Keywords

Pluralism, Pragmatism, Sustainability, Ethical Diversity, Contextual Ethics

Discussion

3.3.1 Environmental Pluralism

Environmental pluralism is based on the belief that one global ethical path is not possible in reflecting the diversity of nature and the differing human relationships with the environment. There are environmental issues that have been dealt with by diverse ecological circumstances, social routines, political pasts, and cultural traditions. For such cases, pluralism provides an open, pluralistic, and contextualised solution to environmental ethics. Rather than insisting on one single principle like utilitarianism, biocentrism, or eco-feminism, it affirms that various ethical standpoints can coexist, supplement one another, and even enrich one another in attempting to locate solutions to the environmental crisis.

- Ethical pluralism finds expression in ecological diversity

- Pluralism listens to divergent voices before it leads

- Mutual concern may emerge out of divergent convictions

Pluralism is not the same as moral relativism. Pluralism does not mean that all values are equal or that harsh discrimination must be given up. Instead, environmental pluralism is a call for interaction with more than one tradition of ethics in order to achieve common ground without dissolving their differences. For instance, the religious reverence of a group of people within a tribe towards a river, the conservationist's ecological justification, and the policymaker's concern for water security can all lead to the same solution of conserving the river, though through different paths. This convergence of consensus makes commitment more robust.

Most importantly, environmental pluralism offers a toolbox for resolving ethical disagreement between cultures and ideologies. When some communities cannot agree about environmental priorities, e.g., logging versus conservation, or sacred groves versus tourism, pluralism does not require that one value system be subordinated to the other. Rather, it promotes respectful dialogue between rival world views in search of negotiated settlements. Neither is the aim to remove disagreement, but to work constructively with it by accepting partial truth in each position.



- Only good decisions result from many voices

Pluralism is governmentally consistent with participatory decision-making. It leads to democratic environmentalism by protecting the voice of local communities, indigenous knowledge regimes, and ground-level opinions. Such decisions will become increasingly socially legitimate and ecologically just. Pluralism, rather than imposing a single-size ethical paradigm for all, will adapt itself to fit into the local context and ensure attention towards human and non-human concerns.

- Pragmatism has a preference for action rather than abstraction

Environmental pragmatism developed from reactions to what its supporters saw as deadlocks and intellectual sterility in environmental philosophy. Bryan Norton, Andrew Light, and Ben A. Minteer, among others, have maintained that anthropocentric/eco-centric debates typically end up in theoretical deadlocks and political standstill. Pragmatists are of the opinion that rather than debate endlessly on ultimate principles, environmental ethics must be pragmatic. It should focus on what succeeds in practice in the preservation and conservation of ecosystems. It is a shift of emphasis from abstract efficacy to practical efficacy, particularly where acute crises such as climate change and extinction are concerned.

- The ethics of here and now

The ethical imperative is not so much about determining universal truths but problem-solving through participatory, open-ended processes engaging diverse forms of knowledge. Pragmatism invites scientists, policymakers, local stakeholders, and ethicists to collaborate in co-designing adaptive, context-specific solutions. For instance, instead of demanding a strictly intrinsic or instrumental estimation of a forest, a pragmatist would ask: What values and priorities constitute the most fair and sustainable stewardship of this forest by all who have a stake in it?

- Pragmatism keeps philosophy at the centre of environmental life.

Particularly, environmental pragmatism is highly democratic. It prioritises deliberative debate and moral pluralism and assumes that environmental policy should stem from informed public debate rather than from abstract theory or elite technocracy. This kind of democratic bent appeals to environmental justice movements that care about centring marginalised voices and place-based knowledge. Pragmatism thus becomes a bridge between theory and action, philosophy and policy, ideals and institutions.

But critics of environmental pragmatism worry that priorities on practicality and compromise dilute the radical

- Pragmatism dances on the high wire of ideals and action

vision of environmental ethics. By avoiding firm positions on key questions, they worry that it might tolerate unsustainable practices in the name of feasibility. But defenders of environmental pragmatism say that pragmatism does not abandon ideals. It treats them as if they were to be reconfigured or redefined according to experience.

- Sustainability requires a balance between current action and future responsibility

3.3.3 Sustainability as a Moral Framework

Sustainability has emerged as a pillar idea in environmental ethics, although its philosophical foundation frequently needs explanation. Fundamentally, sustainability promotes practices and policies that satisfy the needs of the current generation without sacrificing the capacity of future generations to satisfy their own needs. This lovely but serious concept, popularised by the Brundtland Commission's 1987 report, ties environmental moralities to the issue of survival, equity, and justice. Instead of looking at nature as a bank of resources to be exploited, sustainability imagines nature as a long-term partner of human society.

- The moral rule of sustainability

The sustainability ethics centre on human intergenerational responsibility to conserve the environment. It brings the present generations to task with making them think about the implications of their decisions for future generations, thereby bestowing an ethical factor on environmental preservation and resource management. This approach needs a paradigm change from concentrating on momentary profit to thinking in terms of long-term environmental preservation. For example, practices like sustainable agriculture or the utilisation of renewable energy are not only beneficial to the current generation but also to generations yet to come, as they are given the means and environment to survive.

- Sustainability commits the present generation to equity in the interest of future generations.

Sustainability also draws on the idea of intergenerational justice, emphasising equity in the distribution of resources. Philosophers like John Rawls and Peter Singer have driven this debate with the argument of moral duty we have to the future, not as abstract, removed entities but as flesh-and-blood people who should be given an equal chance at flourishing. Rawls's theory of justice, for instance, has the "veil of ignorance" to suggest that if we did not know into which generation we would be born, we would create systems that do not deplete the world's resources or cause ecological degradation.

- Sustainability makes us think systemically, not in units

Yet another essential element of sustainability is the realisation that ecosystems are connected and that harm to one part of an ecosystem will have long-term ramifications. Connectedness necessitates holistic thinking, in which the health of ecosystems, human society, and other organisms is considered together. Philosophical considerations of sustainability resist anthropocentric ethics by adding a wider environmental component that considers the health and resilience of ecosystems. Sustainability, therefore, is no longer a catchword of economic or policy change but a fundamental transformation in the way we live with the Earth and its people.

- Real progress is not defined by growth but by harmony with nature

The moral matrix of sustainability also poses tough questions to growth, consumption, and development. Most critics say that traditional economic growth models are necessarily incompatible with sustainability because they tend to depend on unsustainable consumption. Sustainability proponents promote alternative models like degrowth or steady-state economics that focus more on well-being and ecological integrity than on more economic output. These models confront the idea of “progress” in capitalist societies and propose instead that real advancement lies not in continuous consumption but in improved quality of life and greater ecological equilibrium.

- Sustainability is as concerned about cultural diversity as it is with the balance of nature

Finally, sustainability is not one but highly context-dependent. The context of what constitutes sustainability differs between cultures, places, and eras in history. Local and indigenous knowledge systems most frequently emphasise long-standing ecological stewardship practices that very much originate from principles of sustainability but are different from Western scientific practice. These other constructions of sustainability illustrate the pluralistic nature of the ethics involved, showing sustainable practices often having a culture-specific character and being multiple.

- Pragmatism’s emphasis on utility sometimes at the cost of ethical nuance

3.3.4 Critics and Critiques of Environmental Pragmatism and Sustainability

Even though a popular view, environmental pragmatism and sustainability both have very serious criticisms. The lack of a well-articulated ethical theory is one of the major criticisms of environmental pragmatism. Critics argue that although pragmatism’s emphasis on context-specific, solution-oriented approaches might be useful in the short term, it will be inadequate to address the fundamental moral and philosophical

issues of nature's value and the rights of non-human things. Other thinkers are of the opinion that pragmatic solutions, by emphasising current human needs and sacrifices, neglect the intrinsic value of nature in itself and therefore may still end up providing solutions that remain human-centred in nature.

- Without a well-defined model, sustainability stands to turn into an indistinct, unilluminating term

Another criticism is related to the difficulty of making sustainability meaningful and applicable to everyone. Though the Brundtland definition of sustainability draws attention to the need to balance present and future demands, some argue that the definition is too vague and rarely provides guidance on what to do. Various stakeholders such as governments and companies tend to define sustainability in different ways, and this may result in inefficiency and disputes in policy and practice. Others suggest that in the absence of a sharply defined, widely accepted model, sustainability stands to become diluted with no actual transformative potential.

- Capitalism's inherent growth imperative will most probably be at odds with sustainability goals

Furthermore, the criticism of sustainability tends to focus on its tangible viability in a capitalist economy. The majority of environmentalists are convinced that the capitalist structure, with its focus on growth and expansion, profitability, and consumption, is fundamentally at odds with sustainability objectives. The rewards for constantly expanding markets and continuously increasing products undermine the dividends of sustainability-oriented plans. Global warming can and perhaps will be addressed by tackling the systemic roots of ecological degradation, according to critics like Naomi Klein, who links the climate crisis to capitalism.

- Incremental solutions can perpetuate systemic environmental inequalities.

Environmental pragmatism is also accused of focusing on incremental change rather than quicker transformative action. Critics say that by putting its emphasis on pragmatic, step-by-step solutions, environmental pragmatism sidesteps the kind of fundamental change necessary to reverse environmental destruction. For instance, using market-based solutions like carbon trading to address climate change might not be able to correct the structural power relations and imbalances that are leading to environmental degradation. In such a situation, environmental pragmatism can be employed only to maintain the status quo. It cannot bring the radical changes necessary to make the world sustainable in reality.

The difficulty of putting sustainability into practice within global governing frameworks has come to be a real issue. Most

- The difficulty is in making globally agreed sustainability objectives

nations have adopted the values of sustainability, but putting those values into practice is fraught with difficulties. Global treaties like the Paris Agreement (2015) have made attempts at solving worldwide environmental problems. However, the enforcement mechanisms are often weak, and competing national interests make collective action challenging. Environmental pragmatism, in search of practicality, could conceivably collapse in the face of such global economic and political situations.

- The necessity for more fundamental, more systemic change

Although environmental pragmatism and sustainability are hopeful frameworks for dealing with ecological problems, they are by no means perfect and contain pitfalls. From ethical problems and definitional vagueness of sustainability to the paradoxes of capitalism and the intricacies of global governance, both ideas are gravely challenged. But these are also a call for more just and more revolutionary environmental policy and ethics, which require more profound structural change in order to bring about a truly sustainable world.

Summarized Overview

This unit explores the convergence of environmental pluralism, pragmatism, and sustainability, providing insights into the manner in which these models structure modern environmental thinking and practice. Environmental pluralism is concerned with expressing multiplicity in responding to ecological crises. It acknowledges that the environmental crisis is multifaceted and involves a range of cultural, ethical, and practical considerations. It implies that there is no one universal method that is adequate to address the complex and global nature of environmental issues. Pluralism embraces diversity, calling for multiple voices, especially those of marginalised groups, to be heard in environmental debate. Environmental pragmatism is concerned with pragmatic, context-specific solutions to environmental issues. It avoids the either-or opposition between idealistic, long-term ecological objectives and the short-term, pragmatic concerns of society. Pragmatist philosophy believes that it is conceivable to discover answers that function within current social, economic, and political structures, as opposed to theoretical, universal solutions. Sustainability, a word attached to environmental pragmatism, refers to the capacity of systems such as ecological, economic, or social to last over time without exhausting resources or causing permanent damage to them. The unit takes a closer look at the word “sustainability” and how it has been used in international environmental policy. Although it has been very popular, sustainability has been criticised as being too vague, too easily hijacked by corporations and governments, and not sufficiently addressing the underlying causes of environmental degradation, including overconsumption and inequality. The unit recognises the tension between the ideals of sustainability and the reality of neoliberal

economic systems that prioritise growth over ecological balance. In addition, this module challenges the limits of sustainability in its current form, commenting on how market mechanisms such as carbon trading are able to ignore profound issues such as inequality and resource depletion. It envisions a pluralistic, sustainable future that transcends the ancient dichotomy between human society and nature, and recognises that environmental problems cannot be solved by technological or policy solutions alone, but also need a transformation of societal values, economic structures, and global cooperation.

Self-Assessment

1. Define environmental pragmatism and discuss its core principles. How does it differ from other environmental ethical theories?
2. Explain the concept of sustainability in the context of environmental ethics.
3. Discuss the importance of pluralism in environmental thought.
4. How does environmental pragmatism address the tension between economic growth and environmental conservation? Provide examples.
5. What role does capitalism play in the debate on sustainability? Can sustainable practices be reconciled with capitalist economic systems?
6. Analyse the challenges in implementing global sustainability initiatives. What are the major barriers to achieving widespread environmental reforms?

Assignments

1. Examine the relationship between environmental pragmatism and environmental justice.
2. Critique the Brundtland definition of sustainability. What are its strengths and weaknesses in guiding global environmental policy?
3. Discuss the ethical dilemmas faced by environmentalists when balancing the immediate needs of developing nations with long-term environmental goals.
4. Propose a model of sustainability that could address both environmental and social justice concerns. How would you integrate these two goals in a global context?
5. Evaluate the effectiveness of market-based solutions, such as carbon trading, in addressing climate change. What are the limitations of these approaches?



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BLOCK 4
**Environmental
Movements**

UNIT 1

Impact of Industrialisation and Capitalism in Environment

Learning Outcomes

After the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- explain the historical emergence of industrialisation and its effects on the environment
- critically evaluate the capitalist mode of production in relation to ecological degradation
- identify key environmental issues arising from modern industrial activities
- interpret the philosophical critiques of capitalist-industrial development

Background

As industrialisation emerged in the late 18th century, this was a disastrous departure from traditional patterns of human-nature relations. Economies based on agriculture were displaced by mechanised production, and cultures which hitherto supported their existence on cycles of planting and harvesting were put to work on the linear speed of factory production. The massive consumption of fossil fuels such as coal and then petroleum came to be the hallmark of progress, but this shift based on energy also nourished hitherto unprecedented scales of environmental destruction, deforestation, and depletion of natural resources. Industrialisation, in fact, transformed the conditions of human dependence upon nature, turning from mutually beneficial use to incessant exploitation. This shift was supplemented by the simultaneous growth of capitalism, an economic system of private property, competitive markets, and the pursuit of profit. Capitalism regards nature less as home and more as a source of resources to be commodified and consumed. The forest is not home; it is wood. The river is not sacred or communal; it is hydroelectric potential. The capitalist imperatives of accumulation push the drive for growth into new markets, more extraction from nature, and perpetual pressure on productivity at the expense of ecological balance. Environmental harm



becomes an “externality,” something to be forgotten or outsourced to societies that cannot say no.

These combined hands of capitalism and industrialisation have left their signature on planet Earth. This is in addition to what geologists refer to as the Anthropocene, a geological age of global human-driven change. Its effects are worldwide: melting ice caps, rising oceans, mass extinction and environmental migration. But they do not affect the whole world population. They hit the poor, the native peoples, and inhabitants of vulnerable ecosystems in disproportionate ways. By following the philosophical, economic, and historical roots of current environmental issues, we need to critically analyse the twin forces of industrial advancement and capitalist expansion. The unit critically discusses how industrialisation and capitalism have led to environmental degradation, increased ecological injustice, and shaped the contours of contemporary environmental awareness. It presents the philosophical criticisms of the capitalist-industrial paradigm. This unit also lays the groundwork for comprehending why it is that there are environmental movements

Keywords

Industrialisation, Capitalism, Ecological Degradation, Fossil Fuels, Anthropocene, Commodification of Nature

Discussion

4.1.1 The Industrial Revolution and Environmental Transformation

The Industrial Revolution, which began in the late 18th century, transformed human society, particularly in the West. It marked the end of handcraft and agrarian economies and brought in mechanised production systems. At first, it entered the textile industry, then the coal, steel, and transport industries. It was not only a technical revolution according to scholars. It changed how humans perceived and interacted with nature. Landscapes were no longer experienced as living wholes but as passive containers of raw material. Rivers were used as pipes for waste; forests were cut down for timber and farming, and coalfields transformed entire areas into smoke-filled industrial environments.

- Nature was worked upon, dug out, and dumped

The need for mechanisation required an unparalleled exploitation of natural resources. The steam engine powered by

- The price of economic development was environmental pollution

coal could make machines work faster and longer than hand labour allowed for daylight. It brought exponential output but at the cost of an equal increase in pollution and strain on the environment. Urban areas became areas of factory emissions, sewage overflows, and polluted water. In Manchester and Birmingham in the UK, a dirty industrial world of neglect, filth, sickness, and overcrowding sprang up.

- The Enlightenment fantasy of control became an environmental nightmare

This change also brought a change in philosophy. Nature was no longer an ethical or spiritual force as it had been under previous worldviews. Nature has been understood in terms of utility. The Enlightenment focus on rational control of the natural world came with the feeling that technological progress was human progress. But by focusing on machines rather than ecosystems, industrial society planted the seeds of ecological disaster. Production became more and more dominant over preservation.

- Industrialisation promised efficiency but delivered a legacy of imbalance

The Industrial Revolution is as much a threat as it was a promise. It enhanced growth through the increase of production and urban employment opportunities. It changed the human relationship with the world in its most fundamental ways. This opened the door for worldwide environmental degradation. The cumulative environmental degradation that started is still being felt in climate change, loss of biodiversity, and ecosystem failure.

4.1.2 Capitalism and the Logic of Infinite Growth

- Capitalism goes ahead to profit

Industrialisation provided the machinery, but capitalism gave the monetary driving force for ecological degradation. Capitalism is a system that is expansionist and accumulationist; it has to grow or perish. What this implies is that nature is seen as a collection of inputs to be processed into commodities. Forests are wood, rivers are energy sources, and minerals are investments. With a growing marketplace comes greater utilisation of natural riches with little regard for long-term consequences.

- While capital names growth, nature feels it as depletion

The capitalist urge for profit maximisation leads to the exploitation of nature without reinvestment or maintenance. Corporations extract resources and export waste with the environmental costs neatly externalised. The land, water, and air bear the poisonous traces of production, as the corporations



enjoy the gains. In the majority of such cases, the high costs are borne by vulnerable ecosystems and communities. This leads to the creation of a cycle of pollution and profit together.

- The capitalist dream of abundance is constructed on the ruins of ecology

Global capitalism also works on the premise of unlimited consumer demand. The products are made to not last, but to be discarded and replaced, generating a disposable culture. The practice, which has been termed planned obsolescence, creates wastage and leads to the overexploitation of natural resources. Such exploitation takes resources to an extent that they cannot sustain. Branding, advertisement, and market psychology lure people into the belief that happiness comes from consumption, diverting them from the real sources of happiness such as meaning, environment, and community.

- Capitalist expansion creates harm; it does not eliminate it

Capitalism generates global ecological disaster. Multinational corporations move across boundaries, tending to export the most polluting processes to states with weak environmental regulation or unstable political rule. The ecological cost is hence outsourced from wealthy countries to poor ones, generating zones of sacrifice and paradigms of ecological injustice.

4.1.3 Environmental Inequalities and the Marginalised

- Ecological destruction discriminates

Industrialisation and capitalism have seemed to be equitable processes of development and modernity, but their effects have been drastically unequal. We have seen that environmental degradation does not affect all equally. The poor, indigenous, racially marginalised, and environmentally vulnerable populations in the Global South experience the highest effects. These individuals live beside toxic dumps, pollution-emitting factories, and shrinking forests. They are not displaced by choice, but because economic and social structures drive them to these places.

- Development pushes people out

“Environmental injustice” describes this pattern. African-American neighbourhoods, for example, are disproportionately clustered near landfills, refineries, and poison dumps in the United States. Indigenous tribal communities are systematically cleared out by mining activities or by large dams. Slum inhabitants in cities inhale industrial chemicals, and they drink contaminated water. Such events are not unusual occurrences but are the effects of development paradigms pursued with

a single-minded focus on profit and domination rather than human and ecosystem health.

- Custodians of nature are most likely to be the first victims of nature's exploitation

Moreover, those most harmed by environmental destruction are typically those who have contributed least to it. Small farmers, fisherfolk, and forest dwellers tend to live in closer harmony with nature, saving resources. But their lands are occupied, their rivers are dammed, and their air is poisoned. This is not only a tragedy; it is proof of a system that rewards excess and punishes moderation.

- Environmental justice is the heart of ecological ethics

Environmental battles are no longer simply environmental. They have become deeply political and moral. They involve fundamental questions of rights, justice, and accountability. Who gets to determine what constitutes development? Whose interests are heard in planning decisions? And who gains, with others losing out? Unpacking this dimension turns the environmental discourse from policy to social change.

4.1.4 Philosophical Critiques of Capitalist Industrialism

- Alienation from nature is a structural status of capitalism

Philosophical commentary on capitalism and industrialisation brings out deeper dimensions of ecological damage beyond economics or policy. Karl Marx, in the 19th century, already observed how capitalist systems isolate human beings from nature. In his early writings, Marx outlined how labour, under capitalist circumstances, becomes alienated. Such alienation is not merely from the product and the process but from nature as well. It is in this alienation that nature is no longer felt as a living, mutual friend but as raw material to dominate and possess.

- Reason's reliance by modernity was at the cost of ecological humility

Subsequent critical theorists at the Frankfurt School, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, followed up on this critique of Enlightenment. They contended that the Enlightenment project, based on triumphant reason and control, laid the groundwork for a 'domination of nature' that was aggressive and short-sighted. With this model, the Earth was no longer divine or enigmatic. It was computable, removable, and finally disposable. Science, industry, and capitalist reason came together to impose this instrumental use of nature.



- Ecological wisdom will probably come from the margins

There are other worldviews that arise from non-Western cultures and indigenous philosophies that are counter to the industrial-capitalist system as a whole. To many indigenous individuals, the earth is an ancestor, relative, or living being to whom one is responsible. In contrast to the logic of possession, these cultures prioritise reciprocity, interdependence, and stewardship. Philosophically, they remind us that human beings are part of it.

- Technology, in the pursuit of profit, can be a destructor, not a creator

4.1.5 The Role of Technology in Environmental Degradation

Technological advances have served as the basis for industrialisation. They enabled mass production, resource exploitation, and the swift growth of capitalist economies. While technologies such as the steam engine, electricity, and subsequent automation transformed productivity, they also laid the foundations for widescale environmental devastation. The development of fossil fuel extraction technologies over the 19th and 20th centuries enabled industries but did so while raising global warming, atmospheric pollution, and deforestation.

- Technological advance needs to be weighed against its effect on the environment

Industrial agricultural methods, made possible through technological advancements like chemical fertilizers, pesticides, and genetically modified organisms, provide another instance. While these technologies were intended to boost farm production and help feed an increasing global population, they have resulted in soil erosion, water contamination, and destruction of biodiversity. The use of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) has also raised questions about the long-term impact on ecosystems and human well-being. In this regard, technology has been a double-edged sword: it has lifted production, but at the expense of nature.

- Even green technology requires emancipation from the shackles of capitalism

More recently, improvements in the technologies intended to lessen environmental damage, such as renewable energy and electric cars, have been welcomed as good news. Even these technologies are in capitalist systems that promote constraining their potential. For example, the manufacture of solar panels and electric batteries continues to depend on the mining of rare-earth elements, which has environmental consequences. In addition, the shift to cleaner technologies has been gradual and has been hampered by the economic interests of massive corporations.

4.1.6 Globalisation and Environmental Influence

- Globalisation links economies, but leaves the environment behind

Globalisation, one of the forces propelling modern capitalism, has brought about economic growth and greater interdependence of worldwide regions and nations. It has also been one of the leading forces in bringing about environmental deterioration. Globalisation of trade has assisted in leading to the rapid growth of industries extracting natural resources like mining, logging, and oil drilling, particularly in the Global South. These sectors operate with few or loose environmental laws, using natural resources at unsustainable levels and causing destruction to the local environment. Tropical forest destruction, especially in the Amazon, is a direct result of international demand for wood, agricultural commodities, and mineral commodities.

- The path a product takes is as destructive as its production process

The transport systems used in global business such as shipping and aviation have also turned into gigantic polluters. The heavy fuel oils used by ships and the exhaust gases of airplanes are causing global warming through emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. The environmental price of global supply chains is usually out of sight. Products are typically made in nations where environmental legislation is weak and then shipped to all corners of the globe, where the carbon legacy of the consumer regions or countries goes unnoticed.

- The wealthy gain benefits, and the downtrodden suffer

In addition, globalisation has brought industrialisation to previously untouched regions, especially in poorer nations. While this has promoted economic development, it has come at the cost of an environmental price. Large-scale industrial activities such as dams, mining, and manufacturing have displaced native populations, destroyed ecosystems, and contaminated air and water sources. The trend, therefore, is towards the disparity between the advantages of globalisation—basically tilted in developed economies—and the cost to the environment, which disproportionately affects poor, otherwise marginalised communities.



Summarized Overview

The advent of industrialisation was a turning point in human history, bringing with it broad technological progress and widespread economic development. But the same forces that propelled the change also brought tremendous environmental destruction. Industrialisation, fuelled by fossil fuels and mechanisation, hastened the rate of resource extraction, urbanisation, and pollution, irreparably ravaging ecosystems. Even as the prospect of industrial development was projected as a means to well-being, it also generally seemed to happen at the expense of global ecological health. Capitalism, fuelled by unlimited growth and profit, has increased the exploitation of nature. Capitalist economic practice commodifies nature, which encourages unsustainable behaviours such as overfishing, deforestation, and soil erosion. The ecological impacts of such practices are felt most by the world's poorest and most vulnerable people, whose lands and livelihoods are traded for economic purposes. Even as it has propelled capitalism and industrialisation forward, technology has also been leading the way towards environmental degradation. Technological advancement, from exploiting fossil fuels to industrial agriculture, has accelerated the deterioration of the environment. Yet even attempts at developing sustainable technologies could not actualise their potential to save the world. Globalisation, the second characterising aspect of contemporary capitalism, has intensified the environmental impacts of industrialisation. Global flows of goods and services have created immense resource extraction, raised transport pollution, and caused environmental degradation in the Third World. The gains from globalisation lie primarily in the developed world, with the ecological costs being overwhelmingly shouldered by the Global South, which acts to accentuate the uneven nature of both economic prosperity and environmental damage. In response to these crises, environmental movements have rejected the prevailing paradigms of capitalism and industrialisation. These movements have demanded an alternative model of development which is centred on sustainability, justice, and ecological harmony. They aim to develop a world where economic systems benefit both people and the earth and question our relationship with nature and our conception of progress.

Self-Assessment

1. How did industrialisation contribute to environmental degradation?
2. Discuss the role of technology in both facilitating environmental harm.
3. How has globalisation intensified environmental degradation in developing countries?
4. What are some of the limitations of sustainable technologies within capitalist systems?
5. How do environmental movements challenge the dominant economic paradigms of industrialisation and capitalism?

Assignments

1. Explain how industrialisation, driven by capitalism, has led to the exploitation of natural resources. Use specific examples from history to support your argument.
2. Discuss the relationship between technological advancements and environmental degradation. How can technology be leveraged to address environmental issues?
3. In the context of globalisation, how do the environmental costs of production and transportation disproportionately affect developing countries?
4. Critically assess the role of capitalism in shaping the current environmental crisis.
5. Evaluate the effectiveness of current environmental laws and policies (you may choose any one) in resolving the negative impact of industrialisation and capitalism on the environment. What improvements can be made?
6. What are the key goals of environmental movements in response to industrialisation and capitalism?

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UNIT 2

Animal Rights

Learning Outcomes

After the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- understand the main ideas in animal rights discourse
- compare different views on animal rights, including utilitarian and deontological approaches
- describe the legal recognition of animals and the need for reform
- evaluate the ethical issues in factory farming, animal testing, and the use of animals in entertainment

Background

The ethical treatment of animals has been a debatable issue for centuries. Philosophers and scholars around the world have presented various perspectives on human treatment of non-human creatures. Industrialisation and modern society brought new challenges on this issue because animals are often considered as resources for human beings; as a source of food, entertainment, and for experimentation. Historically, animals were considered property, something to be exploited for human purposes without ethical consideration. But with the sciences bringing us greater awareness of animal consciousness and mental life, so too have calls been growing to rethink our stance on animals. The animal rights movement, which originated in the 20th century, contends that animals have inalienable rights, akin to human rights, which have to be safeguarded by society. The movement is driven by the objective of halting the use and exploitation of animals. According to animal rights activists, animals, being sentient beings, have the right to freedom from harm, exploitation, and unnecessary suffering. This unit will critically examine the theories of animal rights, the legal status of animals, the divide between animal welfare and animal rights, and the salient ethical concerns surrounding current practices. It will also discuss the philosophical argument of speciesism and the morality of animals. It will challenge learners to critically consider the human-animal relationship in contemporary society.



Keywords

Speciesism, Sentience, Animal Welfare, Ethical Treatment, Factory Farming

Discussion

4.2.1 Philosophical Foundations of Animal Rights

Underlying animal rights theory is the notion of sentience, or the capacity to feel pain and pleasure. Peter Singer, in his seminal book *Animal Liberation* (1975), believed that sentience is the foundation for moral consideration, and as many animals are capable of this, they must be given equal moral standing to human beings. Like we saw in a previous unit, Singer's utilitarian moral philosophy advocates minimising suffering and maximising welfare for every sentient creature, whether human or nonhuman. Speciesism, in Singer's view, is the careless bias in favour of one's own species that makes the exploitation of animals legitimate and moral.

- Sentience becomes the moral basis for treating animals with equal consideration

- Supports a rights-based approach to treating animals

- The ethical argument for animal rights requires a fundamental change in the way people think

Tom Regan, by contrast, derives animal rights deontologically. Regan's thesis, presented in his book *The Case for Animal Rights* (1983), is that animals, being subjects-of-a-life, have inherent value and cannot be treated as a means to an end of human beings. Animals do have inherent value, according to Regan, and their rights must be respected, as human rights are respected. Unlike utilitarian perspectives, where the suffering of animals is permissible if it leads to a greater good, Regan's deontological stance points to the inherent evil of using animals as resources even if this maximises human benefit.

These philosophical positions not only reject the common notion of animals as commodities but also form the basis of the legal acceptability of animal rights. This transition from imagining animals as things to envisioning them as creatures that have intrinsic rights is a revolutionary paradigm that has the potential to change everything related to human society, ranging from the food sector to scientific experiments.

4.2.2 Animal Welfare and Animal Rights

“Animal welfare” and “animal rights” are used interchangeably. But they signify two different concepts of the

- Animal welfare does not go to questioning exploitation

way animals ought to be treated. Animal welfare is concerned with enhancing the living conditions of animals, with a focus on how animals ought not to be treated in a way that makes them undergo avoidable suffering. It enables the use of animals for agriculture, science, and entertainment, provided their well-being is given thought and their pain avoided. Animal welfare activists feel that such modifications can make a big difference in the lives of animals, even though it does not end the use of animals by humans entirely.

- Animal rights demand an end to the use of animals

But the animal rights movement is more extreme. It insists that it is always wrong to use animals for human purposes, no matter how kind the treatment. Animal rights supporters believe animals should not be used or exploited by humans at all. It doesn't matter if the conditions are good or bad. Using animals for food, experiments, or entertainment is wrong. They want to stop all such use, not just make it more humane. animals in any arena of human endeavour.

- Divergent opinions on the ethical treatment of animals

The division between these two views has created debates within the animal protection movement. Although some are of the opinion that animal welfare reforms are a temporary measure to improve the lives of animals, others think that these reforms are merely a way of legitimising the ongoing exploitation of animals. The welfare versus rights debate is a reflection of differing views on the moral standing of animals and what is ethically appropriate in our treatment of them.

- Speciesism entails unequal treatment based on an arbitrary difference

4.2.3 Speciesism and Moral Implications

Speciesism is the assumption that one's own species (the most frequent being human beings) is superior to all others and thus justified in using them for any particular purpose. This was started by Richard Ryder in the 1970s, who suggested that speciesism is a prejudice. Peter Singer further developed this argument by comparing speciesism to other discriminations that involve inequality in treatment on the basis of race or gender. Singer argued that speciesism is wrong because it entails the over-valuation of an arbitrary trait, namely, membership in a species. For him, it is also the neglect of the ability of a being to suffer.

The ethical issue with speciesism is that it provides human beings with the justification for exploiting non-human animals by assuming that animals are less valuable or less deserving



- To combat speciesism is to oppose a broader system of morality

of consideration just because they are not human. This type of argument has historically been employed to defend such forms of activity as slavery, colonialism, and male dominance over women. Through the establishment of analogies between speciesism and other types of oppression, animal rights activists assert that human beings should rise above their prejudices and extend moral regard to animals regardless of species.

- The struggle against speciesism is a call for moral equality

The ethical argument against speciesism is not that humans and animals are similar in every way, but that the ability to suffer is the measure that must dictate our ethical choices. Just as we would not excuse ill-treating a human being on the grounds of race or sex, we would not excuse ill-treating an animal on the grounds of species. The identification of animals as sentient entities deserving moral consideration is the foundation for the abolition of speciesism and the expansion of rights to animals.

4.2.4 Legal Status of Animals

- Legal evolution reflects growing awareness of animal sentience and protection

The legal status of animals has been a subject of continued debate, with most legal systems in the past considering animals as property and not as rights-holding entities. In the ancient legal system, animals were regarded as commodities to be owned, bought, and used by humans at their discretion. Over time, though, the social attitude towards animals has evolved, and animals are increasingly recognised as sentient beings that must be protected from unnecessary suffering. Legislation has been enacted in most nations to regulate the treatment of animals, particularly in agriculture, science, and entertainment.

- Full legal acknowledgment of animal rights involves basic changes in the law

Some legal systems have gone even further in recent years by granting limited legal rights to animals. For instance, there are enactments of laws in some jurisdictions that positively acknowledge that animals are sentient beings. Such laws forbid their abuse. Reforms like these, however, as argued by animal rights activists, are not yet adequate because they still permit the exploitation of animals in experiments and factory farms. Full legal acknowledgment of animal rights, they argue, would call for a change in the legal status of animals from pure property to beings with inalienable rights to life, liberty, and dignity.

The legal status of animals is not merely an issue of how to save them from torture but about transforming the very nature of our relationship with them. If animals are to be regarded as

- Shifting the legal status of animals is an important move toward real ethical consideration

rights-bearing entities, this would require a transformation in the way animals are conceived and utilised by society. Legal systems would have to engage with the structural use of animals as commodities and provide them with legal protections in the same manner as humans.

- The morality of animal testing is weighed on the scales of scientific progress against animal agony

4.2.5 Animal Testing and Research

Animal testing refers to the practice of using animals in experiments to test consumer products, drugs, and cosmetics for safety, side effects, and efficacy. Some believe that animal testing has resulted in numerous scientific developments, such as disease treatments and vaccines. Others have criticised such practices due to ethical and moral reasons for utilising animals for this purpose. Most animal rights activists believe that animal testing is unnecessary and inhumane because animals experience physical agony, mental suffering, and even death during the experiment.

- Alternatives to animal testing call for innovation and kindness in scientific studies

Critics of animal testing also believe that animals are not ideal models of human physiology, and findings from animal tests are usually irrelevant to humans. For instance, some of the drugs that are found safe in animals are found to be unsafe or not effective when consumed by humans. The painkiller Vioxx, though deemed safe in animal tests, was withdrawn after causing thousands of heart attacks in humans, showing the limits of animal-based research. As new alternatives for testing are being found, like in vitro testing, computer simulation, and human-based research, there is increasing pressure to eliminate animal testing and adopt more accurate and humane alternatives.

- The morality of animal testing compels society to learn more moral and trustworthy substitutes

The ethical issues surrounding animal testing challenge us to re-evaluate the cost of scientific progress at the expense of sentient beings. While some have argued that animal testing is an evil that has to be tolerated in pursuit of knowledge and public safety, others have maintained that it is morally objectionable and needs to be replaced by less inhumane and more effective research methods.

4.2.6 Factory Farming and Its Ethical Problems

Factory farming is intensive, industrial farming of animals for food. The animals in factory farms are crowded in close living spaces, which sometimes do not even receive natural light or allow the animals to freely exercise their own behaviour



- Factory farming is less concerned about animals' welfare

or movements. The animals in factory farms endure the worst possible conditions like crowding, hunger, and dehydration, along with painful practices such as debeaking and docking tails. Debeaking is the removal of part of a bird's beak to prevent pecking injuries in crowded conditions. Tail docking is cutting off part of an animal's tail (commonly done to pigs) to reduce biting or injury in confined spaces. The sole aim of factory farming is to generate maximum profit by selling meat, eggs, and milk products at minimum costs, to the detriment of animal welfare.

- The cruelty of factory farming has prompted widespread moral anger

The moral issue of factory farming arises from the magnitude of animal suffering involved. With billions of animals in factory farms across the globe, the question of whether it is moral to treat animals in this manner becomes the foundation of the argument for animal rights. Animal rights activists contend that factory farming is cruel by nature because it treats animals as commodities to be consumed by humans.

- Stopping factory farming would be of moral, environmental, and health advantage

Proponents against factory farming also contend that the side effects of industrial agriculture, such as environmental pollution, tree clearing, and global warming, are yet another justification for re-examining the morals of factory farming. Most animal rights activists perceive that banning or phasing out factory farms would be a plus for animals, the world, and humanity.

Summarized Overview

The animal welfare issue is well-founded in ethical arguments regarding the moral status of animals, their ability to suffer, and the ethical implications of their use for human ends. Two prevailing theoretical positions underlie the very centre of this debate: Peter Singer's utilitarian touchstone and Tom Regan's deontological theory. Singer contends that the welfare of all sentient beings must be taken into account equally and that animal suffering can be mitigated by bringing to an end or curtailing activities such as factory farming and animal testing. Regan is more rights-oriented, contending that animals, like human persons, have inherent value and cannot be treated simply as instruments of human use. Both approaches oppose the conventional beliefs that treat animals as property, as opposed to their ability to suffer and human moral obligations towards them. The animal rights movement encourages an essential shift in ethical norms towards legal and social reform regarding animals as sentient beings worthy of protection and respect. Animal welfare changes, which attempt to enhance the status of

animals within current systems, are a move in the right direction; they are not extreme enough to resolve the underlying ethical questions, according to many. It seeks a complete transformation of our orientation towards animals and challenges the ethical acceptability of using animals as food, experiments, and forms of entertainment. Last but not least, the animal rights debate forces society to review its moral responsibility and do all that is necessary to ensure that animals receive the respect and dignity that they deserve, and are kept from any form of harm.

Self-Assessment

1. What are the key differences between animal welfare and animal rights? How do these differences influence ethical perspectives on animal treatment?
2. In what ways do Peter Singer's utilitarian arguments for animal rights challenge traditional views on the moral treatment of animals?
3. How does Tom Regan's deontological approach to animal rights differ from utilitarianism?
4. What ethical concerns are raised by practices such as factory farming and animal testing?
5. What legal and social reforms would be necessary to better protect the rights of animals, and how might these reforms challenge existing practices?

Assignments

1. How does Peter Singer's utilitarian approach to animal rights differ from Tom Regan's deontological approach?
2. What are the key ethical issues involved in factory farming, and how do they relate to animal rights theory?
3. Discuss the concept of speciesism and its role in the debate on animal rights.
4. What are the ethical implications of animal testing?
5. How can legal frameworks be reformed to better protect animal rights?



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UNIT 3

Environmental Movements

Learning Outcomes

After the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- identify important environmental movements in India and around the world
- explain why these movements started and what they wanted to achieve
- describe how people over the globe protested to protect the environment
- understand the role of local people and women in environmental movements
- discuss how these movements led to changes in laws and public awareness

Background

The twentieth century saw a growth of industrialisation, urbanisation, and human interference with nature, which resulted in environmental degradation on a scale never seen before. Developmental narratives talked of modernisation and progress, while the ecological price we pay was discounted. Rivers were dammed, forests cut down, and mountains dug out, at times in national interest, at the expense of the displacement of people and devastation of habitats. This context led to a variety of environmental movements across the world, some of which were the result of people's movements and others the result of efforts by ecologists and civil society. India also saw a peculiar blend of ecological awareness in different environmental agitations. This not only protected nature but also challenged social justice, indigenous rights, and sustainable development. This unit tries to provide an overview of significant environmental movements in India as well as important international movements by tracing their historical beginnings, forms of resistance, philosophical underpinnings, and effects on environmental policy. These movements further demonstrate how issues of ecology blend with cultural, economic, and political issues.

Keywords

Environmentalism, Eco-resistance, Sustainability, Grassroots, Development, Conservation

Discussion

4.3.1 Silent Valley Movement

The Silent Valley Movement is commonly considered to be India's first environmental protest. The Silent Valley rainforest in Kerala's Palakkad district is one of the last remaining tracts of undisturbed tropical evergreen forest in the Western Ghats, which is a listed hotspot of biodiversity. In the 1970s, the Kerala State Electricity Board suggested a hydroelectric project on the Kunthi river that would have caused the submergence of this fragile ecosystem. Environmentalists, biologists, and nature enthusiasts worried about the suggested project because of the valley's immense ecological value and as a habitat for a number of endangered species, like the Lion-tailed Macaque.

- The Silent Valley was an ecological gem

- Scientific rationale and cultural needs were brought together in a common resistance

- Democratic pressure halted a project and preserved a forest heritage

It started as a scientific concern initially, but soon became a mass movement. The Kerala Sasthra Sahithya Parishad (KSSP), a science movement, played a leading role in creating awareness through popular science writings, street plays, and public gatherings. Poets like Sugathakumari penned emotionally charged poetry that moved the masses. The movement was successful because it was able to connect scientific information with cultural and emotive stories. Locals and civil society forces as a class expressed that any development is not acceptable at the cost of the irrevocable destruction of an ancient ecosystem.

National media attention and mounting popular pressure finally compelled the central government to act. Letters were written to the Prime Minister, public demonstrations were held all over Kerala, and environmental issues reached mainstream political debate. In 1980, the then-Prime Minister Indira Gandhi appointed a high-level committee to examine the ecological impact of the project. Due to its recommendation and continuous civic pressure, the project was put on hold and in 1984 officially declared as the Silent Valley a national park.

The Silent Valley Movement not only saved a superior environment but also declared an awakening of green



- Silent Valley's legacy endures as an ecological democracy tutorial

consciousness in India. It altered popular discourse from mere blind faith in development to a more mature realisation of sustainable development. It demonstrated that civil society, if educated and committed, can kill or give birth to policy. The movement still serves as an inspiration to India's and the world's ecological movement, demonstrating that environmental values can triumph over short-term industrialisation.

- A turning point in resisting state-led developmentalism

4.3.2 Narmada Dam Movement (Narmada Bachao Andolan)

The Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA), or "Save the Narmada Movement," was an extremely potent environmental and human rights movement in India. Initiated by the enormous Sardar Sarovar Dam project, which was part of the overall Narmada Valley Development Plan, to build more than 3000 dams on the Narmada River and its tributaries. Though the project had promised irrigation, drinking water, and power, it was achieved at the expense of flooding thousands of hectares of fertile land with water, displacing Adivasi people, and flooding forests and wildlife habitats.

- Displacement is not merely physical—it shatters worlds

Led by Baba Amte, Medha Patkar, and other grassroots leadership, the NBA moved from resisting the implementation of the dam to resisting the development paradigm it embodied. The displaced were not asked and not fairly compensated by the state authorities. Both ethical and constitutional principles were violated. The movement set forth the proposition that displacement was not loss of home alone but loss of social solidarity, cultural heritage, and ecological harmony.

- Nonviolent resistance challenged global finance and state power

The NBA employed a mix of tactics: non-violent protests, court actions, fasts unto death, public hearings, and global campaigning. Their campaign placed in the limelight the murky environmental clearances process and the lack of effective rehabilitation policies. The 1990s witnessed mounting global pressure, particularly after the World Bank's role was criticised, and it finally withdrew from the project.

- redefined development in the language of justice and dignity

While the dam was ultimately constructed, the NBA was successful in placing the moral frames of development centre stage in public discourse. It created a re-evaluation of what is and is not of national interest, and who gets to decide. By placing ecological sustainability in terms of human rights, the NBA opposed the zero-sum thinking between progress and tradition,

and instead promoted alternative visions of development grounded in justice and popular control.

- NBA's voice still echoes wherever rivers face silence by concrete

Its legacy is not in stopping the dam but in planting seeds for ecological participatory governance. The NBA mobilised thousands of movements across India and the Global South, offering a template for resisting extractive projects and making them accountable. The movement still resonates in mega-infrastructure debates, climate justice, and indigenous sovereignty today.

4.3.3 Chipko Movement

- A face-to-face battle between the custodians of nature and industrial interests

The Chipko Movement started in the 1970s in the hill state of Uttarakhand (then part of undivided Uttar Pradesh). It is widely accepted to be the first mass environmental movement in India. Its name, “to hug” in Hindi, sums up the nature of the protest: children, women, and local residents literally hugging trees to stop contractors from cutting them down. When widespread deforestation occurred, and the government was sanctioning the cutting of trees for wood and commercial purposes, the Chipko Movement was a voice of rebellion and ecologism.

- The movement revealed the complex relationship of people with their forests

The movement arose from the intimate reliance which local residents had on their forests. To such societies, the forests were not merely systems but a part of their survival, culture, and spiritual life. The government proposal to permit contractors to cut down many trees without any regard for the social, ecological, and economic implications evoked fierce resistance. Spearheaded by environmentalist Sunderlal Bahuguna and guided by Gandhian techniques of non-violent struggle, Chipko turned into a people's movement with rural women in large numbers taking part.

- Women's involvement in Chipko

Chipko's success was attributed not only to the direct action of tree-hugging but also through mobilisations, discussions, and campaigns making the need for sustainable use of forests and the harmful impacts of uncontrolled deforestation obvious. The demonstrators employed slogans such as “Ecology is permanent economy” in an attempt to promote a more ecologically sustainable development model. Chipko also drew attention to the contribution of women towards environmental conservation. The women involved in the movement, being mostly mothers and grandmothers, were brought out as the true guardians of the environment.



- Converted local resistance to national transformation

By their determination, the Chipko movement was able to slow down deforestation in the area, compelling the government to reconsider its policies on forests. In 1980, the Indian government enacted the Forest (Conservation) Act, which significantly reduced forest destruction. This was a concrete triumph for the movement because it established that grassroots movements, especially one based on local traditions and knowledge, can be effective in steering national policy.

- Paved the way for subsequent environmental movements

Within the wider environmental movement tradition, the influence of the Chipko movement was significant. It showed that environmentalism does not need to be a state- or science-controlled top-down process. Instead, environmentalism could be a local-level grassroots process based on lived experience and traditional ecological knowledge. The movement saved trees but also set the agenda for the wider debate on ecological balance, development, and justice.

4.3.4 Appiko Movement

- Struggle to retain ecological harmony against commercial incursions

Another notable environmental movement that draws inspiration from the Chipko Movement is the Appiko Movement, begun in 1983 in the Western Ghats of Karnataka. “Appiko” itself is a term used locally and means “to hug,” since Chipko activists embraced the trees. The Appiko Movement was a unified approach to safeguarding the Western Ghats, a tract of biodiversity owned by the country. The biosphere was threatened by monoculture plantation expansion and wholesale deforestation. These monoculture plantations that dominated the growing of species such as eucalyptus and acacia were regarded as devastating to the immense variety of native flora and fauna of the land.

- Environmentalism was integrated with culture

This Karnataka movement was a metaphorical protest, yet a culturally charged plea to retain. Villagers, inspired by activists like S. R. Hiremath, protested against contractors pulling up the native forest trees by embracing the trees out of desperation in a bid to halt their removal. In addition to these direct protest actions, they organised mass consciousness-raising activities to inform local communities of the threat posed by deforestation and the ecologically harmful character of monoculture plantations.

The protests launched by Appiko uncovered the religious and cultural significance of forests for local communities. The

- Limelight the intimate cultural relationship between humans and forests

Western Ghats forests were not only sources of forest products but part of the people's culture and life as well. The movement highlighted how the stripping away of the forests was not merely an environmental issue but also a social and cultural one, given that the people of the area lived off the forest. By their tree-hugging demonstrations, the Appiko activists aimed not only to save the trees but also the indigenous lifestyles associated with the forest.

- Local legends and folk songs fuelled the movement

But one feature of the Appiko Movement was its mobilization of the young. Local students and schoolchildren became pivotal actors in carrying the message of environmental protection. Traditional songs and narratives were also employed by the movement as mechanisms to mobilise collective action, thus transforming the protest into a political as well as a cultural phenomenon. The cultural dimension provided a bridge across the generation gap, thus allowing the movement to rally a wide constituency of people ranging from young students to old villagers.

- Empowering local communities to fight for their ecological rights

In spite of the reluctance of the government and the corporates, the Appiko Movement succeeded in halting large-scale cutting of trees in some areas of the Western Ghats. Even though the movement was not entirely successful, it created a country-wide awareness about the conservation of India's forest cover and biological diversity. Additionally, Appiko showed how much influence grassroots movements can have; if locals unite to defend their nature, they can make a permanent difference in policy and public opinion.

- A single protest by a single teenager

4.3.5 Global Environmental Movements: Fridays for Future

The Fridays for Future movement started in 2018 when Swedish environmental activist teenager Greta Thunberg began demonstrating outside the Swedish Parliament every Friday by skipping school to urge the government to do more on climate. With only a homemade hand-written sign that said "Skolstrejk för Klimatet" (School strike for climate), Thunberg drew attention to how the climate crisis has been growing with an urgency that is now mismatched with all the political speeches yet without any concrete action being taken on the climate crisis.

- Made climate science politicised by young people

What had begun as a single protest in Stockholm quickly became international. Thunberg's message caught on with students all over the world, and the Fridays for Future student walkouts erupted in cities around the globe. This young people's movement is noteworthy in that it called for immediate action on climate change based on the most recent scientific evidence, most notably that of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which continued to warn that the world was quickly losing time to curtail global warming and prevent devastating environmental damage.

- Social media allowed young people to call out world leaders

Fridays for Future has been marked in a particular manner from others by its substantial use of social media as a platform to mobilise, organise, and present its demands. Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook have provided platforms for student activists to connect with each other, organise global strike action, and have their demands heard globally. Using hashtags, the movement became viral, particularly among young people and young adults who believed that their future was being threatened by the complacency of earlier generations.

- Climate action activism bridges the environment with justice and equality

Fridays for Future's demands involved lowering greenhouse gas emissions, shifting to renewable energy sources, and ensuring that world governments fulfil the commitments under the Paris Agreement. The movement is not so much about marching against inaction on climate; it is more about fighting for an equitable and just transition to sustainable global living. Thunberg and other campaigners have always made the case that the world climate crisis is, disproportionately, affecting the most vulnerable, such as poorer countries and minority groups, and that the fight against climate change must be a global issue of social justice.

- Made youth activism a mainstream movement towards global change

Since the movement has grown progressively bigger, it has brought youth engagement to the forefront of influencing future politics and policy agendas. Greta Thunberg has become the face of Fridays for Future, moving globally to address important world stages like the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP) and the European Parliament. Thunberg's radical speeches have inspired not just young people but also adults and policymakers to rethink their reactions to climate change. Fridays for Future has therefore made youth activism a mainstream movement, with millions of participants at global climate strikes every year.

- Youth-led climate protests rewrote the narrative on sustainability

Through its energetic and uncompromising activism, Fridays for Future not only brought climate change to the top of the global political agenda but also shaped climate policy and public debate, particularly in the European Union, the United States, and beyond. As political figures and companies are still attempting to respond to the movement's calls, Fridays for Future has actually initiated a worldwide debate on the urgency of climate action, leaving its footprint on the future of green movements.

- Disrupts the status quo by engaging in radical, direct action

4.3.6 Global Environmental Movement: Extinction Rebellion

Extinction Rebellion (XR) was launched in 2018 in the UK as a militant, expressive response to the growing climate crisis. Based on non-violent civil disobedience politics, its central demand is that governments and institutions act swiftly to cut carbon emissions and prevent the loss of biodiversity. XR's ideology is that existing political and economic systems are failing to meet the challenge of what XR perceives as an exponentially expanding climate crisis. Only radical, direct action will force governments and corporations into action.

- Demonstrations interrupted climate change as a political crisis

XR immediately received media coverage with its approaches like mass civil disobedience, street blocking, and "die-ins," designed to disrupt daily life and gain media coverage. The leadership and membership of the movement hold that the failure of governments to address the climate crisis with the urgency it demands is evidence of societal collapse. Thus, action must be taken quickly to avoid the worst effects of climate change. By organising high-level demonstrations in London, New York, and Paris, XR attempted to shift climate collapse from being an abstract issue to an immediate political crisis.

- Decentralised, participatory organising empowered a broad coalition of communities

One of the distinctive characteristics of XR is that it possesses a decentralised organisational structure. In contrast to more top-down hierarchical movements, Extinction Rebellion is a horizontal type of organisation, with decision-making decentralised between local groups and individuals being invited to have a say in the movement. This model of participation fosters a sense of ownership and shared responsibility among activists, and XR is therefore highly attractive to a broad variety of individuals, particularly those disenchanted with traditional political institutions. It is also very inclusive, with a focus on diversity, equity, and intersectionality in messaging and practice.

- Non-violence and telling the truth became guiding principles

Extinction Rebellion is also pulling from past non-violent movements, most specifically the actions of leaders like Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr., who employed civil disobedience against repressive systems. XR has embraced the philosophy of non-violence as its creed even when confronted with state repression and police violence. The movement's slogan, "Tell the truth," is a declaration of its commitment to reveal the truth about the climate crisis by keeping political or economic interests aside.

- Opposes gradualism in favour of radical climate policies

One benefit of the Extinction Rebellion strategy is the calling out of the climate crisis as an emergency, requiring immediate and radical action. XR does not believe that incremental reform or market-led solutions will solve the climate change crisis. The movement calls for visionary, bold policies such as an urgent switch to renewable energy, an end to fossil fuel subsidies, and adherence to a zero-carbon economy. Among XR's central proposals is the establishment of citizens' assemblies, meaning democratic institutions that would steer the way to a sustainable future.

- Aggressive approach put climate change in the spotlight

With their theatrical protests, XR has been able to increase public awareness of the seriousness of the climate crisis. The activism of the movement has also sparked extensive media coverage, which has contributed to heightened support for more radical climate policies in many countries. XR has also been criticised by environmentalists who feel its disruptive methods alienate potential supporters or undercut other types of activism. Even so, Extinction Rebellion continues to impact political agendas and leads the world's ecological movement.

- Tree planting to renew the environment

4.3.7 Global Environmental Movement: Green Belt Movement

The Green Belt Movement was established in 1977 by Kenyan environmentalist Wangari Maathai in response to the destructive impact of deforestation in Kenya. The main objective of the movement was to respond to the environmental damage caused by deforestation, which resulted in soil erosion, water scarcity, and the removal of indigenous species and wildlife. The concept behind the Green Belt Movement was to plant trees to renew the environment. Along with focusing on reforestation, the initiative also sought to empower the local communities, especially women, by engaging them directly in tree planting and care.

- Women were empowered by means of environmental action

Wangari Maathai recognised that women, particularly those who lived in rural areas, were directly impacted by the deterioration of the environment. They gathered firewood, fetched water, and farmed, all of which were adversely affected by deforestation. By going out to plant trees, the movement solved environmental problems. It also gave the women a sense of purpose and direction. Thousands of women organised to plant millions of trees, and the Green Belt Movement then became an emblem of women's empowerment as well as environmentalism.

- Advocated for sustainability and improved farming methods

The movement also emphasised the complementarity of environmental conservation and sustainable agriculture. In addition to forest replanting, the GBM encouraged agroforestry, in which trees were integrated into agricultural farming to enhance the soil and avoid erosion. The practice enabled people to be economically rewarded by agriculture and forest products, an alternative to destructive farming systems. The Green Belt Movement demonstrated that conservation and livelihood were compatible.

- Linked environmental causes to social justice

When the movement gained momentum, the Green Belt Movement extended its efforts to advocate for more global environmental and social justice causes. It aimed to support democratic governance, human rights, and gender equity as fundamental. Addressing the community's environmental issues also reflected the global causes of ecological destruction, demonstrating that environmental justice and social justice go hand in hand. This expansion of its mission helped to establish the Green Belt Movement as a paradigm of grassroots environmentalism.

- Evolved into an international model of grassroots activism

Wangari Maathai's leadership in the Green Belt Movement earned her international recognition, culminating in her receiving the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004. Maathai became the first African woman to win this prestigious award, which also shows the global impact of the movement. The Green Belt Movement's success was not just about planting trees; it was about creating a global conversation about the interconnections between peace, democracy, human rights, and environmental sustainability.

The Green Belt Movement remains a source of inspiration for environmental restoration and social justice movements. Its influence manifests in the countless trees planted and



- Still struggling for social justice and sustainability

communities mobilised by its efforts. Through the connection of environmental activism with women's empowerment, democracy, and peace, the Green Belt Movement proved the ability of grassroots movements to be powerful vectors of sustainable change.

Summarized Overview

The unit has examined major environmental movements, both within India and around the world, that have been central to the struggle for environmental protection and social justice. From the struggle of the Silent Valley Movement to preserve a rare rainforest in the Western Ghats to the Narmada Bachao Andolan campaign against displacement caused by the Sardar Sarovar Dam, the movements demonstrate how environmental protection has become interlinked with concerns such as human rights and indigenous justice. The Chipko and Appiko Movements gave us an idea about how ordinary people, through non-violent activism, could undo forest loss and facilitate community conservation. All over the world, Fridays for Future, Extinction Rebellion, and the Green Belt Movement set examples of how youth activism, civil disobedience, and reforestation have transformed environmental discourse in the world. These movements have not only been nature protection movements but also have intensely linked environmental issues with wider social, political, and cultural agendas. Through courtroom struggles, direct action, or global campaigns, these movements have changed the way we think about development, rights, and the future of the world. They demonstrate that environmental action is not merely about defending ecosystems but about building a fairer and more sustainable world for everyone.

Self-Assessment

1. What was the ecological significance of the Silent Valley, and why was it under threat?
2. How did the Narmada Bachao Andolan challenge the development narrative in India?
3. In what ways did the Chipko Movement empower women and local communities?
4. Discuss the cultural and environmental context of the Appiko Movement.
5. What are the global implications of youth-led movements like Fridays for Future?
6. How do grassroots movements contribute to environmental policy change?
7. What are the core strategies and demands of Extinction Rebellion?
8. What role did the Green Belt Movement play in linking environmental and social justice?

Assignments

1. Compare and contrast the objectives and methods of the Chipko and Appiko movements.
2. Critically examine the role of civil society in resisting large development projects like the Narmada Dam.
3. Analyze the emergence of Fridays for Future as a global environmental movement. What makes it unique compared to earlier movements?
4. Evaluate the significance of Silent Valley in shaping environmental consciousness in South India.
5. How can environmental movements strike a balance between development and conservation?
6. Discuss the relevance of non-violent civil disobedience in global environmental movements, with reference to Extinction Rebellion.
7. Examine how the Green Belt Movement contributed to both ecological restoration and women's empowerment in Africa.

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Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.

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