



Some Ethical Perspectives On Environmental Degradation In Post Independent India

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Abstract: The entirety of all living and non-living things is referred to as the environment. Humans have a responsibility to safeguard and conserve the environment. However, the contrary is evident. Following independence, certain dishonest businesses in our nation are damaging the environment for their own comfort, greed, personal gain, and other reasons due to the influence of western capitalists and imperialists. Deforestation, air, water, soil, and radiation pollution, population growth, economic disparity, and the extinction of some species are just a few of the environmental issues that India, like other nations, is dealing with. We are therefore having a very hard time surviving in all facets of life. In this context, we ought to prioritize sustainable development, which aims to meet present needs without jeopardizing the ability of future generations to meet their own. It seeks to achieve a balance between social well-being, environmental preservation, and economic advancement in order to ensure long-term sustainability for both people and the planet. As moral beings, we ought to express some ethical principles that place the utmost priority on the environment. Indian environmental ethicists have consistently advocated ecocentrism, in which everything, including inanimate objects, has intrinsic value, in opposition to the anthropocentric approach. In India, morality and spirituality are regarded as the cornerstones of our culture. There have been numerous movements in India in recent years to protect Mother Nature. People's values can be linked to how they treat the natural environment. It should be the ethical relationship between people and their surroundings that has the potential to bring about world peace, prosperity, and overall progress.

Keywords: Environment, Western Capitalists, Imperialists, Environmental preservation, Sustainable development, Ecocentrism.

INTRODUCTION

“Sarve Sukhinassantu sarve santu niramayah

Sarve bhadrani pashyantur ma kascid dukha-bhagabhavat.”

(“May all be happy, May all be free from disease. May all realise what is good. May none be subject to misery.”)—*Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*

The French term "Environ," which meaning "surroundings," is where the word "environment" originates. Therefore, the entirety of all living and non-living things and their interactions with one another can be referred to as the environment. The air we breathe, the water we drink, the land we live on, and the ecosystems that sustain all living things make up the environment, which is the basis of life on Earth. Every organism, including humans, contributes to the ecological balance of the environment, which is a complex and interrelated system. Every person's overall growth is entirely dependent on their surroundings. Without the resources, like food, air, water, wood etc. that the environment provides, we could not survive. Humans and other living and non-living creatures in the environment have coexisted in perfect peace from the dawn of time.

Since we are all descended from the same creator, our ancient customs teach us to preserve the environment and live in peace and harmony with it. Given that all living things are likewise products of the Almighty, we have no authority to hurt them.

THE CONCEPT OF ENVIRONMENT IN INDIAN TRADITION

In Indian tradition, the idea of the environment is firmly anchored in a variety of facets, including philosophical, spiritual, and cultural ideas. Indian philosophy reflects a harmonious coexistence of humanity and nature by fusing the natural world with human existence. The ancient texts, religious rituals, and everyday life all make reference to this relationship. This intimate connection is exemplified by a few fundamental concepts from Indian tradition. Prakriti, or nature, is regarded in Indian philosophy as the primordial nature or the natural world. As Prakriti, nature is respected and seen as a living being with inherent rights that should be cared for and protected. Prithvi (Earth), Apas (Water), Agni (Fire), Vayu (Air), and Akasha (Space) are the five main elements that make up the cosmos, including humans, according to Indian belief. These components are revered, and it is thought that harmony in the environment and human well-being depend on them remaining in balance. Understanding these components highlights the fact that people are an essential component of nature rather than something distinct from it. Nature is frequently personified and deified in Vedic literature. One of the earliest writings, the Rigveda, has hymns that honor many facets of nature, including rivers, forests, mountains, and animals. Respect for the natural world is shown in deities such as Agni (Fire), Varuna (Water), and Vayu (Wind). The philosophical writings known as the Upanishads promote care for all living things, including the environment, by highlighting the interconnectivity of the universe and the oneness of all life (Advaita). Ahimsa, a fundamental tenet of Buddhism, Jainism, and Hinduism, encompasses all living things and the environment in addition to interpersonal connections. A tradition of not harming animals, plants, or ecosystems is fostered by this regard for life in all its forms, which promotes a way of life that reduces ecological harm.

CAUSES OF ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION IN INDIA

The above mentioned relation between environment and human is something we've been taught since the beginning of our civilization. However, as time went on, we ignored it and came to believe that we were in charge of everything and that the world was there to serve us. From this point of juncture, environmental degradation has been taken place. A mix of natural and man-made factors contribute to environmental deterioration, with unsustainable resource usage, population increase, urbanization, and rapid industrialization being the main causes of India's environmental degradation.

1. RAPID INDUSTRIALIZATION

Rapid industrial growth has resulted in uncontrolled pollution releases into the air and water, particularly in industries like manufacturing, mining, and chemical production. Untreated sewage, toxic effluents, and industrial waste are frequently discharged straight into rivers and lakes, drastically lowering the quality of the water. Large amounts of sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxides, and particulate matter are released into the atmosphere by factories and power plants, particularly those that use coal, which contributes to acid rain and air pollution.

2. POPULATION GROWTH

India, one of the most populated nations on earth, is putting plenty of strain on its natural resources, including its forests, water, and land. Growing demands on infrastructure, food, and housing result in resource depletion and environmental hardship. Urban areas in particular have experienced uncontrolled city expansion due to rapid population increase, which has contaminated the surrounding environment and encroached on natural habitats.

3. DEFORESTATION

The need for food and India's expanding population have caused forests to be cleared for agriculture, especially in regions like Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, and Odisha. The spread of cash crops and slash-and-burn methods are two factors that lead to the decrease of forest cover. Increased soil erosion and biodiversity loss have been caused by extensive deforestation brought on by city growth and the building of roads, highways, dams, and other infrastructure projects. Illegal mining and logging practices are significant causes of

deforestation in states with abundant forests, like Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, and Assam, which has a long-term negative impact on the ecosystem.

4. AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES

Intense farming techniques are used to supply the expanding population's food needs. Excessive use of chemical pesticides and fertilizers has contaminated water, degraded soil, and reduced biodiversity. Growing a single crop over a vast area gradually reduces the fertility of the land by depleting soil nutrients. In important agricultural areas like Punjab and Haryana, this type of unsustainable farming has also led to a deterioration in soil quality. Groundwater is crucial for irrigation for farmers in states like Maharashtra, Haryana, and Punjab. Water shortage has gotten worse due to the quick depletion of groundwater sources caused by over-extraction.

5. AIR POLLUTION

As the number of automobiles on Indian roadways continues to rise, vehicle emissions are now a significant contributor to air pollution. Particulate matter and nitrogen oxides are two dangerous pollutants that are released when older cars, diesel engines, and subpar fuel standards are used. Crop residue is frequently burned by farmers in northern India, especially in Punjab and Haryana, after harvest in order to get ready for the following crop. Known as stubble burning, this activity contributes to smog and air pollution by releasing significant volumes of smoke and particle matter into the environment. Due to the extensive use of wood, manure, and crop residue for heating and cooking in rural regions, dangerous chemicals are released into the atmosphere, which exacerbates respiratory illnesses and indoor air pollution.

6. WATER POLLUTION

There are frequently insufficient sewage treatment facilities in India's expanding metropolitan areas. Water sources become contaminated as a result of the regular release of untreated sewage into rivers and lakes. This is a significant problem for rivers like the Yamuna and Ganges. Aquatic ecosystems and water quality are negatively impacted by the untreated discharge of hazardous chemicals, heavy metals, and other pollutants into adjacent water bodies by several enterprises. Rivers, lakes, and groundwater are contaminated by runoff from agricultural areas that include fertilizers, pesticides, and herbicides. As a result, drinking water quality declines and aquatic life is harmed.

Massive urbanization, infrastructural development, over exploitation of our natural resources and many other reasons are responsible for India's environmental degradation.

EFFECTS OF ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION IN INDIA

India's environmental degradation affects people and the environment in many ways. These effects have an impact on biodiversity, agriculture, the economy, public health, and general quality of life. The following are some of the main consequences of India's environmental degradation:

1. ISSUES IN PUBLIC HEALTH

Air pollution in India is among the worst in the world, especially in major cities like Delhi, Mumbai, and Kolkata. Asthma, lung cancer, respiratory and cardiovascular disorders, and early mortality are caused by exposure to high concentrations of particulate matter, dangerous gases such as nitrogen dioxide and sulfur dioxide, and ground-level ozone. Waterborne illnesses including cholera, diarrhea, and dysentery are brought on by contaminated water from lakes, rivers, and groundwater sources. Long-term health concerns including cancer and skeletal disorders are also brought on by arsenic and fluoride poisoning of groundwater in areas like West Bengal and Bihar. Inadequate waste management and disposal practices, such as open dumping and burning, result in harmful emissions that raise the prevalence of allergies, skin diseases, and respiratory issues in cities.

2. IMPACT ON AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SECURITY

Crop productivity has decreased in many agricultural regions due to soil degradation caused by excessive use of chemical fertilizers, pesticides, and monoculture farming. Food security is under jeopardy because of this, especially for small-scale farmers who depend on large harvests to support themselves. Water shortages are caused by deforestation, excessive groundwater extraction, and unpredictable rainfall patterns brought on by climate change. In areas like Rajasthan and Maharashtra that are prone to drought, this impacts

irrigation and results in crop failures. A significant section of India's workforce is employed in the agricultural industry, which is particularly vulnerable. Desertification has accelerated due to land degradation, especially in regions like Gujarat and Rajasthan. Rural communities become impoverished as a result of this additional depletion of agricultural land.

3. CLIMATE CHANGE AND SEVERE WEATHER

Climate change is making floods, cyclones, droughts, and heatwaves more common and severe in India. People are displaced, infrastructure is destroyed, and a great deal of life and property is lost as a result of these extreme weather occurrences. The rapid melting of the Himalayan glaciers is endangering the water supplies of millions of people who rely on rivers that get runoff from the glaciers. Future disputes over water supplies may worsen as a result, and there may be shortages of water. Rising sea levels pose a threat to coastal cities like Mumbai, Chennai, and Kolkata because they can cause flooding and force coastal people to relocate. Significant mangrove erosion is endangering both wildlife and human settlements in the Sundarbans.

4. ECONOMIC LOSSES

Because of health issues and environmental risks, pollution and environmental damage lower worker productivity. According to estimates, air pollution alone costs the economy billions of dollars in lost productivity and medical expenses. The tourism business is adversely affected by pollution and environmental degradation in ecologically sensitive areas such as the Himalayas, coastal regions, and national parks, which make India's tourist attractions less appealing. Climate change-induced increases in flooding, droughts, and other extreme weather events cause expensive damage to homes, infrastructure, and agriculture. In coastal states like West Bengal and Odisha, cyclones and floods have resulted in significant financial losses.

5. LOSS OF BIODIVERSITY

Many species, including endangered ones like the Asiatic lion, Bengal tiger, and one-horned rhinoceros, are losing their habitats as a result of pollution and deforestation. India's rich biodiversity is at danger due to the loss of wetlands and forests. Pollination, water purification, soil fertility, and carbon sequestration are among the ecological services that are impacted by biodiversity loss. This in turn affects the availability of clean water, climate regulation, and food production. Human-animal conflicts rise as wildlife habitats are reduced due to forest clearing for agriculture and urbanization. Elephants, tigers, and leopards have been known to wander into human settlements in a number of states, resulting in crop damage and fatalities.

6. SOCIAL INEQUALITY AND POVERTY

Poor and underprivileged groups are disproportionately impacted by environmental degradation. Slum expansion and social tensions are exacerbated when rural residents relocate to urban areas in search of employment due to the loss of arable land caused by soil degradation, droughts, and floods. Communities that depend on forests, fisheries, and farming are some of the groups most impacted by environmental degradation. Tribal populations' livelihoods are impacted by forest degradation, while coastal communities suffer from the decrease of fish stocks brought on by water pollution and overfishing. Poverty is made worse for low-income households by the increased cost burden of pollution-related health problems.

SOME ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENTS IN POST-INDEPENDENT INDIA ON ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION

India has long been known for its environmental protection. However, it has drastically changed since India gained its independence. The most notable of these are the Silent Valley Movement, Chipko Movement, Jungle Bachao Andolan, Narmada Bachao Andolan and Appiko Movement.

SILENT VALLEY MOVEMENT

In order to preserve the pristine tropical rainforest, which is an ecologically rich and diverse area that is home to a wide variety of flora and fauna, including many endemic and endangered species in the Western Ghats of Kerala, a movement was started by the locals in the late 1970s and early 1980s to oppose the construction of a hydroelectric project in the Silent Valley. In the early 1970s, the Kerala State Electricity Board proposed constructing a hydroelectric dam on the Kunthipuzha River, which passes through the Silent Valley. Prominent individuals who strongly opposed the dam project included renowned ornithologist Dr. Salim Ali

and prominent agricultural expert Dr. M. S. Swaminathan. The protestors emphasized that the intricate ecosystem, which had taken millions of years to develop, could not be restored once the forest was destroyed. The Government of India established an expert committee in 1979 to evaluate the dam's environmental effects in response to the mounting opposition. Because of the possible ecological damage the project might cause, the committee, which was chaired by Dr. M. G. K. Menon, suggested that it be abandoned. The Silent Valley region was designated a national park in 1984 after the project was formally abandoned in 1983.

CHIPKO MOVEMENT

The word "chipko" in Hindi, which means "to cling" or "to embrace," represents the people's strong bond with trees and their commitment to preserving the natural world. The Chipko Movement started in the 1970s in the Garhwal region of Uttarakhand, in the foothills of the Himalayas, to protest deforestation. Because the area is densely forested, local communities have historically relied on the trees for a variety of necessities, including fuel, food, water, and agricultural implements. When the loggers arrived to cut down the trees, the village women, led by Gaura Devi, Sudesha Devi, and others, embraced the trees, preventing them from carrying out their duties. As a result, the campaign brought attention to how important women are to environmental preservation. As a model of grassroots environmental activism, the movement gained national and international prominence as it expanded throughout India. Significant progress was made by the Chipko Movement in its battle against deforestation. After years of demonstrations, the Indian government banned commercial logging in Uttarakhand's Himalayan woods for 15 years in 1980.

JUNGLE BACHAO ANDOLAN

An Indian environmental movement known as the Jungle Bachao Andolan (Save the Forest Movement) first appeared in the 1980s, mostly in the tribal areas of Bihar, Odisha, and Jharkhand. Indigenous tribal communities started the movement in protest of government policies that endangered their customary rights to resources and forest areas. There was strong opposition to the government's proposal to replace natural forests with commercial plantations, particularly from the tribal tribes that had coexisted peacefully with the forests for many years. These groups saw the forest as essential to their life and culture, not just a source of financial gain. Tribal people, environmentalists, and grassroots groups spearheaded the movement in opposition to the government's selection of commercial interests over the preservation of natural biodiversity.

NARMADA BACHAO ANDOLAN

A social and environmental movement in India called the Narmada Bachao Andolan was founded in the middle of the 1980s to protest the building of massive dams on the Narmada River. In order to defend the rights of those impacted by the development and to increase public awareness of the social, environmental, and human costs of major infrastructure projects, the Narmada Bachao Andolan was led by environmental activists, farmers, tribal communities, and those who had been displaced by the dam projects. Hundreds of thousands of people, primarily farmers, villagers, and members of tribal communities who lived along the Narmada River's banks, were anticipated to be displaced as a result of the dams' construction, especially the Sardar Sarovar Dam. It was anticipated that the massive dams would have detrimental effects on the ecosystem, such as submerging enormous areas of fertile land, destroying trees and biodiversity, and changing the river's natural flow. The project's long-term benefits could be jeopardized, according to environmentalists, because the dams would cause deforestation, the loss of wildlife habitats, and an increase in soil erosion and salinity. To raise awareness of the cause, Medha Patkar and other activists employed Gandhian strategies of nonviolent protest, like as sit-ins and hunger strikes.

Some other Environmental movements that are acquired in India are- Appiko Movement(1980s): a movement against deforestation in the Western Ghats of Karnataka, Save the Western Ghats Movement (1987); a campaign to preserve the Western Ghats' biodiversity, one of the world's hotspots for biodiversity, Cauvery River Protection Movement (1990s); protest against industrial waste, excessive water extraction, and deforestation causing the Cauvery River to deteriorate and become polluted, Tehri Dam Protests (1990s); resistance to the Tehri Dam's development on the Bhagirathi River, which would flood communities and force thousands of people to relocate, Delhi Ridge Movement (1970s); safeguarding the Aravalli range's Delhi Ridge against urbanization and degradation, Mitti Bachao Andolan (Save the Soil Movement, 1970s) ; to stop land degradation and soil erosion brought on by excessive irrigation and inappropriate land use etc.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THESE MOVEMENTS

By increasing public awareness of the value of protecting delicate ecosystems and the long-term effects of development initiatives that ignore environmental concerns, these movements signaled a sea change in India's environmental history. These movements contributed to the development of the notion that some places, particularly those with abundant biodiversity, ought to be protected for scientific and ecological reasons as opposed to being used for temporary financial advantage. These movements also serve as a symbol of the effectiveness of grassroots environmental advocacy. These movements were essential in strengthening vulnerable communities, spreading the value of sustainability and increasing public knowledge of environmental protection. The history of these movements serves as a reminder of the close relationship between humans and nature and continues to inspire environmental movements around the world.

IMPORTANCE OF ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS IN INDIA

India's complicated environmental problems and distinct socioeconomic and cultural background have made the need for environmental ethics there more pressing. For India to support sustainable development, maintain ecosystem health, and safeguard the welfare of its citizens, environmental ethics must be put into practice. India urgently needs environmental ethics for the following main reasons:

Because of their inherent worth and function in supporting life, forests and ecosystems are encouraged to be preserved under environmental ethics. Ethical considerations encourage measures that protect the health of people and ecosystems and call for the decrease of pollution. Sustainable behaviors that lower greenhouse gas emissions and lessen the effects of climate change are required under environmental ethics. Protecting vulnerable people and implementing sustainable agriculture practices are key components of ethical approaches. In order to guarantee sustainability over the long run, environmental ethics promote the prudent and just use of resources. To ensure that progress does not come at the expense of ecological health, ethical standards are crucial for striking a balance between environmental preservation and economic growth.

Even though India has many environmental regulations, such as the Wildlife Protection Act of 1972 and the Environment Protection Act of 1986, there are frequently gaps in their application and enforcement. Environmental ethics guarantee that policies put ecological health ahead of immediate financial advantages and support the need for more robust legal frameworks. Ethical business practices are necessary due to the growth of Indian businesses and corporations. As part of their Corporate Social Responsibility, companies are encouraged by environmental ethics to implement sustainable practices, lower their carbon footprint, and make investments in environmental protection.

In India, environmental ethics are essential for tackling urgent issues including social justice, pollution, deforestation, and climate change. These moral principles direct people, groups, governments, and corporations toward environmentally friendly, biodiversity-preserving, and future-generation-friendly behaviors. By adopting environmental ethics, India may strike a balance between the need to preserve the environment and its economic goals, guaranteeing a fair and sustainable future for all of its people.

CONCLUSION

Human attitudes and ideals toward nature need to be reexamined in light of the environmental challenges. There ought to be a close bond and kinship between nature and humans. The foundations of a sound environmental ethics are laid when man becomes enlightened and starts to see the importance of preserving the environment. Despite being the custodian, guardian, and overseer, man is unable to deviate from his established roles in the natural world's everyday activities. There should be a greater awareness of ecological issues to prevent cruelty to all living things. It is important to raise locals' understanding of ecological issues. The wellbeing of everyone who lives in and around the environment is enhanced by environmental awareness.

Long-term success depends on involving local communities and giving them the tools they need to take care of their surroundings. India can achieve a balance between environmental preservation and development by working together with the business sector, civic society, and government, guaranteeing a better future for everybody. Important actions include promoting renewable energy, improving waste management systems, and implementing sustainable farming methods. Public awareness efforts, tougher enforcement of environmental regulations, and reforestation are all equally important. Not only this, all laws and regulations adopted by the Government of India to protect the environment must be strictly enforced. More and more NGOs ought to take

the lead role in public education, legislative influence, and the promotion of environmentally friendly local practices. In the end, protecting the environment is crucial for the survival and standard of living of all species, including humans, as well as for the future of the planet.

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