

## Thoughts to meet the Post Covid-19

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Advancement in science and technology has created a unique position for human beings in this planet. We are blessed with the scientific inventions which have made our everyday life comfortable and has empowered us with technology to dominate the earth over another animal. In respect to this recent achievement of technology, it may be said that we have looked forward to this unparalleled situation of human beings overlooking the dangers hidden behind this material and technological gains.

In this context, a question may be raised from the standpoint of environmental ethics. If we say that nature should be preserved for the sake of human existence, then care for nature becomes only a means to the end of preservation of human existence.

Anthropocentrism, from a philosophical viewpoint argues that human beings are the central or most significant entities in the world. This is a basic belief embedded in many Western religions and philosophies.

Here Anthropocentrism means “human being at the centre” It derived from ancient Greek word “Anthropos”, means “for human being” and “Ketrnom”, means “centre”. Regarding this view that human being as the central element of the universe. Assuming, human beings is to the final aim of the universe, as per placing humanity at the centre, so that other forms of life only serve human beings. Philosophically, it can refer to the point of view that humans are the only, primary holders of moral standards.

This human centric or anthropocentric view was very much popular and was supported by Christianity. Peter singer writes that in the early books of the bible and the philosophy of the ancient Greece particularly that of Aristotle put humans at the centre of the moral universe. The biblical story of creation in Genesis makes very clear the Hebrew view of the special place of human beings in the divine plan: “And God said, let us make man in our image, after our likeness and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.”<sup>1</sup> So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him, male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said upon them, be faithful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the flow of the air, and over every living that moved upon the earth. Peter

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<sup>1</sup> Singer Peter, (2011), *Practical ethics*, Cambridge, New York, p-239

Singer further writes that for much of the western tradition, however, humans are not merely of central moral significance, but they constitute the entirety of the morally significant features of this world. Aristotle<sup>2</sup> regarded nature as a hierarchy in which those with less reasoning ability exist for the sake of those with more. Thomas Aquinas, whose life work was the melding of Christian theology with the thought of Aristotle, and in addition to Aristotle, Acquaintswrote in his major work “*Summa Theologica*”<sup>3</sup> human supreme position accords with god’s command.

Time has come when humans must think over the damages they have made and endangered the existence of themselves as well as of other animals by encroaching over nature. Atomic explosions, cutting of trees and deforestation, industrial pollution, over population etc. have led to changes in natural eco system, global warming, climatic changes, environmental threats like ozone depletion and air pollution, acidification of oceans, shortage of fresh water, fuel, and other natural resources. All of these change is inextricably linked to the health of human societies. Under this situation, scientist and policy maker are constantly trying to make men understand that harm to nature often results in harm to humans.

So, other philosophers and thinkers who do not support this anthropocentric view consider all creatures of intrinsic value. Something is of intrinsic having value if it is good or desirable, for its own sake, in contrast to something having value only as means to an end. An argument in favour of the supremacy of human beings is that they can feel—they are sentient beings leaving other living things outside the boundary of sentient beings. It grants moral standing to such natural objects as animals, plants, and landscapes.

But those who are the supporters of non-anthropocentric view try to extend an ethics beyond human beings as the only sentient creatures. Should we extend this boundary to include animals birds and planets on the ground that they also feel again? Albert Schweitzer used a phrase “Reverence for Life”<sup>4</sup> which may be said to be the best-known defence of an ethics extends to all living things. According to him, ‘We must have the same reverence for life towards all will- to – live as towards my own.’<sup>5</sup> True philosophy must commence with the most immediate and comprehensive facts of consciousness. And this may be formulated as follows, ‘I am life which wills to live, and I exist in the midst of life which wills to live’.<sup>6</sup> Just as in my own will-to-live there is a yearning for more life, and for that mysterious exaltation of the will which is called pleasure, and terror in face of annihilation and that injury to the will-to-live which is called pain: so the same obtains in all the will-to-live around me, equally whether it can express itself to my comprehension or whether it remains unvoiced.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p-240

<sup>3</sup> Aquinas, Thomas, (1485), *Summa Theologica*, Benzinger Brothers, New york, p-256

<sup>4</sup> Singer Peter, (2011), *Practical ethics*, Cambridge, New York, p-249

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p-249

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p-249

Ethics thus consists in this, that I experience the necessity of practising the same reverence for life toward all will-to-live, as toward my own. Therein I have already the needed fundamental principle of morality. It is good to maintain and cherish life: it is evil to destroy and to check life. A man is really ethical only when he obeys the constraint laid on him to help all life which he is able to succour, and when he goes out of his way to avoid injuring anything living. He does not ask how far this or that life deserves sympathy as something valuable, not how far it is capable of feeling. To him life as such is sacred.

The American philosopher Paul Taylor defended a similar view in his book 'Respect for Nature', arguing that every living thing is 'pursuing its own good in its own unique way'.<sup>7</sup> Once we see this, he claims, we can see all living things as we see ourselves and therefore, we are ready to place the same value on their existence as we do on our own.

Human beings should also remember that to maintain the ecological balance. Each and every member of the environment should be preserved and taken care of. Man does not occupy the supreme position in the world, but he is only one among other species and elements of nature not for the sake of human beings only but for the sake of nature itself. Animals, plants and even non-living elements like rivers, oceans, mountains, or land have their own right on this planet.

Aldo Leopold<sup>8</sup> felt the necessity of a "New Ethics" which will deal with man's relation to land and to the animals and plants which grow upon it. He also proposed 'Land ethics' which includes ethical values towards soils, water, plants, animals or collectively, the land. Later Arne Næss<sup>9</sup> wrote a brief article distinguishing between 'shallow' and 'deep' ecology. Shallow ecological thinking reflects the view of old, traditional, anthropocentric ideas. Whereas 'deep ecology' caters a Holistic view which values the biosphere for its own sake and not for the sake of human beings only.

Deep ecology is an environmental philosophy promoting the inherent worth of living beings regardless of their instrumental utility to human needs, plus a restructuring of modern human societies in accordance with such ideas. Deep ecology argues that the natural world is a subtle balance of complex inter-relationships in which the existence of organisms is dependent on the existence of others within ecosystems. It argues that human interference with or destruction of the natural world poses a threat therefore not only to humans but to all organisms constituting the natural order.

Deep ecology's core principle is the belief that the living environment as a whole should be respected and regarded as having certain basic moral and legal rights to live and flourish, independent of its instrumental benefits for human use. Deep ecology is often framed in terms of the idea of a much

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<sup>7</sup> Taylor, Paul, (1981), *Respect For Nature: a Theory of Environmental ethics*, Penguin, New York, p-456

<sup>8</sup> Singer Peter, (2011), *Practical ethics*, Cambridge, New York, p-253

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p-288.

broader sociality; it recognizes diverse communities of life on Earth that are composed not only through biotic factors but also, where applicable, through ethical relations, that is, the valuing of other beings as more than just resources. It is described as “deep” because it is regarded as looking more deeply into the actual reality of humanity’s relationship with the natural world arriving at philosophically more profound conclusions than those of mainstream environmentalism.

In 1985 Bill Devall and George Sessions<sup>10</sup> summed up their understanding of the concept of deep ecology with the following eight points.

- The well-being of human and nonhuman life on earth is of intrinsic value irrespective of its value to humans.
- The diversity of life-forms is part of this value.
- Humans have no right to reduce this diversity except to satisfy vital human needs
- The flourishing of human and nonhuman life is compatible with a substantial decrease in human population.
- Humans have interfered with nature to a critical level already, and interference is worsening.
- Policies must be changed, affecting current economic, technological and ideological structures.
- This ideological change should focus on an appreciation of the quality of life rather than adhering to an increasingly high standard of living.
- All those who agree with the above tenets have an obligation to implement them.

An understanding of environmental ethics with a wider view of reverence to every member of eco-system leads us to re-assess our notion of the goal of our life. Real achievement of life is not something material but the development of one’s own abilities. If we investigate Indian Philosophical texts, we find verses strongly supporting the Holistic view that all beings exist by the love of God who resides in all bodies.

Today in our life we all are suffering from the anthropocentric view. To overcome this pandemic situation, we must take a Holistic view. Human beings with their nature-greed, violence, invention of technology has the power to conquer the earth materially. They did so and human beings are the centre of attention of the present world. With the discovery of new technology people are starting to misuse them. That may cause a huge destruction or problem in the environment such as air pollution etc. One of the examples is that present situation where people are getting affected by the Covid-19. In India every single day large number of people is getting affected by the virus and many of them are also dying. We look forward to a future disease-free world. We must look back to ancient India.

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<sup>10</sup> Devall, Bill and George, (1995), Deep ecology for Twenty first Century, Shambhala, The University of Michigan, p-400

Indian Sages had deep respect for nature. Manusamhita, Atharva –Vedas, Jain and Buddhist literature all are enriched with verses which offer love and respect to each element of the universe. It was a part of their lifestyle to love and care nature. We should be proud of our ancient Indian Culture and heritage and try to follow their advice to build up a new world which will combine advancement of civilization together with love and reverence to nature and Mother Earth.

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