

SEMESTER II
PAPER IX: CONTEMPORARY DEBATES IN
POLITICAL THEORY

ENVIRONMENTALISM

PSC-C204

Dr. Seema Mallik
Dept of Political Science
Utkal University, Bhubaneswar
Email: seema.mallik@gmail.com
Mob: 9437930006

SECTION I-ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT

- ◉ Environmentalism / ecologism is a unique ideology placing the relationship between human beings and the natural world at the centre of its concern
- ◉ Term ecology derived word *oikas* meaning household or habitat, coined by Ernst Haeckel in 1866.
- ◉ since early 20th century ecology considered as a branch of biology that studies the relationship between living organisms and their environment.
- ◉ With the green movement in the 1960s ecology has been converted into a political term and ideology ecologism
- ◉ different strains like shallow ecology or environmentalism or deep ecology

- Ecologism is different from other ideologies which place man as centre (anthropocentrism) ie world has been made for human beings who create all value
- Ecologism rejects this human-centred thinking of conventional political ideology.

ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT

- Ecological ideas can be traced to ancient Eastern religions like Hinduism, Buddhism and Taoism
- Contemporary ecologism or green politics emerged in the 1960s
- This can be traced as a reaction to rapid industrialization in the 19th century when John Muir(1838-1914) argued for preservation of nature for its own sake. Gifford Pinchot (1865-1946) argued for preservation of nature for their own utility. Also Ernst Haeckel coined the word in 1873.
- Reaction most in more industrialised countries .

CONTD...

- ◉ In Germany powerful movements of ‘going back to nature’ ; ideas of pastoralism evoked by Nazis during the 20th century.
- ◉ Growing literature: Rachel Carson’s ‘The Silent Spring (1962) was the first book drawing attention to ecological crisis; Ehrlich Harriman’s How to be a Survivor (1971); Goldsmith at al Blueprint for Survival(1972); UN Report ‘ Only one Earth(1972); Club of Rome’s The Limits of Growth(1972)
- ◉ New pressure groups emerged like Greenpeace and Friends of Earth, World Wildlife Fund(WWF)
- ◉ UN Conference on the Human Environment, Stockholm(1972) was first coordinated approach.
- ◉ Brundtland Report, 1987 advance the idea of sustainable development
- ◉ Rio Summit , 1992.

SECTION II-CORE THEMES

- ◉ Return to Nature
- ◉ Ecology
- ◉ Sustainability
- ◉ Environmental ethics
- ◉ From having to being

ECOLOGISM: RETURN TO NATURE

- ◉ By end of 1970s ecologism had become a full ideology going beyond its pressure group concerns for environment commonly referred as environmentalism.
- ◉ Ecologism emphasises on the centrality of environment while conventional ideologies had stressed on the centrality of humans. David Ehrenfield calls it as ‘arrogance of humanism’.
- ◉ Ecologism sets to transform human consciousness and reconfigure our moral responsibilities. Main themes are as follows:

ECOLOGY

- ◉ Central principle of all green thought
- ◉ Development of scientific ecology changed our understanding between the natural world and human beings in it.
- ◉ Threat to ecosystems by human activities ie population growth, pursuit of wealth resulting in depletion of natural resources , fuel resources , forests, pollution of water bodies , air , use of harmful chemicals , pesticides.
- ◉ Extinction of species and dominance of humans.
- ◉ Thus emphasis on ecocentrism
- ◉ Different views : Shallow ecology and deep ecology(Arne Naess)
- ◉ Shallow ecology: man must conserve natural world to sustain mankind (also referred as environmentalism)
- ◉ deep ecology: purpose of human kind is to sustain nature and not the other way round (ecologism)

HOLISM

- ◉ Fritjof Capra ‘ *The Turning Point* ‘ (1992) . Changed thinking that nature is an economic resource of scientists and philosophers .
- ◉ Scientism has resulted in present environmental crisis. Reductionism ideas of Rene Descartes and Issac Newton
- ◉ Notion of *holism* emerged ; Coined by Jan Smuts in 1926
- ◉ Natural world can be understood as a whole and not in parts . Each part has a meaning only in relation to other parts and ultimately to the whole.
- ◉ New ideas in 20th century called ‘new physics‘ moved beyond the mechanistic and reductionist ideas of Newton.
- ◉ Parallels drawn between new physics and religion particularly eastern mysticism which preached oneness with nature. Earth conceived as ‘Mother Earth’.
- ◉ ‘Gaia hypothesis’ (*Gaia* is Greek Goddesses of the Earth) developed by James Lovelock. This proposes that the earth is best understood as a ‘complex, self-regulating living being’.

SUSTAINABILITY

- ◉ Conventional ideologies believed in the unlimited possibilities of material growth and prosperity (both capitalism and socialism). Both promoted restless exploitation of nature.
- ◉ Earth now understood as a “spaceship”ie a closed system. First developed by Kenneth Boulding(1966).
- ◉ Like a spaceship earth has also limited resources. It will decay and disappear ie **entropy. Eg energy crisis.**
- ◉ E.E.Schumacher ‘ Small is beautiful’(1973) argued that humans have plundered fossil fuels
- ◉ Garrett Harding’s “tragedy of the commons”(1968)

ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

- ◉ This refers to a moral and ethical understanding of nature.
- ◉ Conventional ideologies were anthropocentric oriented towards the satisfying human needs and greed.
- ◉ Ethics calls for an understanding of present human actions and their consequences on future generations .
- ◉ This moral concern for our children is regarded as a ‘natural duty’ and linked to *ecological stewardship*.
- ◉ Another standard of environmental ethics moral standards and values for other species .
- ◉ Eg Animal rights . Most influenced by Peter Singer’s (1976) concern for animal welfare.
- ◉ Goodwin(1992) further developed ‘ green theory of value’ which holds that resources should be valued because they result from natural processes rather than human activity. Also reflected in deep ecology.

FROM HAVING TO BEING

- ◉ Ecologism has reshaped our understanding of human well-being and happiness .
- ◉ Consumerism leaves individuals with constant dissatisfaction and cravings . German psychoanalyst and social philosopher Eric Fromm(1979)
- ◉ This forms the cultural basis for environmental degradation . Human development has been dangerously unbalanced.
- ◉ Therefore ecologists have emphasised on ‘quality of life’ and separating human happiness from material possessions and acquisition.
- ◉ Shift from ‘having’ to ‘being’. Being is an attitude of mind that seeks to transcend the self or individual ego and to recognize that each person is intrinsically linked to others and to the universe itself.
- ◉ Self- realization comes through broader and deeper identification with others. This is key doctrine of Eastern religions particularly Buddhism.

SECTION III: SUB- TRADITIONS WITHIN ECOLOGISM

- ◉ Modernist Ecology
 - ◉ Social ecology
 - ◉ Deep ecology
1. **Modernist ecology** is a form of green politics that is reformist in the sense that it aims to promote environmentally sound ecological practices, without rejecting the central features of capitalist modernity.
 - ❖ It is thus a form of shallow ecology. Influenced by liberalism and conservatism
 - ❖ This believes in enlightened anthropocentrism

2. Social Ecology

- ◉ Coined by Murray Bookchin
- ◉ Linked to the idea that environmental degradation is linked to social structures.
- ◉ Encompasses three distinct traditions
- ❖ **Ecosocialism** : pronounced by German Greens. Extolled pastoralism and small-scale craft communities living close to nature ; closely associated with Marxism. Rudolf Bahro(1982) argued that natural world has been damaged by capitalism.
- ❖ **ecoanarchism** : Influenced by 19th century anarchists Peter Kropotkin. This believes that as stateless society will create harmony spontaneously, the ecosystem should also be away from 'human rule'. As anarchists advocate the creation of decentralised communes/ villages, ecoanarchists also advocate communes which will be self-sufficient and close to nature.(Murray Bookchin(1962)

❖ **ecofeminism :**

- ⦿ This has grown as one of the most significant schools of environmental thought.
- ⦿ Basic theme is that ecological destruction has its roots in patriarchy.
- ⦿ The sexual division of labour inclines men to subordinate women and nature.
- ⦿ Both women and nature are close as they have the capacity to regenerate. There is a natural bond between both
- ⦿ Therefore , to subdue and exploit nature is more of a feature of men than women.
- ⦿ Thus patriarchy is detrimental to nature.
- ⦿ Vandana Shiva (*Staying Alive*)

Deep ecology(discussed earlier)

- ⦿ Coined in 1973 by Arne Naess
- ⦿ Emphasises on ecocentrism instead of anthropocentrism

SECTION IV: ECOLOGISM IN THE 21ST CENTURY

- ◉ Environment is a global issue as it is not confined to national boundaries. Have a transnational character.
- ◉ Issue of climate change confronting the international community.
- ◉ Modern green movement has strong concerns about globalization which is regarded as hyper-industrialization. Responsible for higher levels of pollution
- ◉ Problem of ecologism becoming a global ideology because of lack of global consensus. Conflict between developed and developing countries over industrialization and carbon-dioxide emissions.
- ◉ Kyoto Protocol emphasised on the responsibilities of developed countries more than developing countries. (Adopted in 1997; came into force in 2005)
- ◉ A 'green thought' has emerged as a powerful influence in the form of green parties, green movements which have put the environment in tjhe political agenda.
- ◉ Although the demands for dismantling industrialization and a low-impact society are far from being met , ecologism has taken hold of governments all over the world to check further deterioration of the environment.

◎ References

1. Heywood, Andrew(reprint 2017), Political Ideologies, Palgrave, Macmillan
2. Eatwell, Roger and Anthony Wright(reprint 2005), Contemporary Political Ideologies , Rawat, India.
3. Farelly , Colin , Political theory: a reader
4. Oxford Hand Book of Political Theory

Note: *These are basic references which is available with all. If more is required by anyone they can consult me.*