

MODULE 12 - ETHICS OF ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

OBJECTIVES

After a study this e-content module the learners will be able to:

1. Define ethics, moral standards, ecosystem, ecological ethics, utilitarianism, deontology,
2. Describe the Characteristics of moral standards.
3. Describe the Characteristics of ecological ethics.
4. Describe moral theories supporting nature.
5. Explain the reasons for granting the status of person to non human beings.
6. Describe Indian ethos for environmental conservation.
7. Describe the aims of environmental education.

SUMMARY

The word ethics and morality are frequently used interchangeably but here we have explained the difference between the two terms. We have also covered the characteristics of moral standards, ecological ethics or deep ecology, moral theories supporting nature. Indian ethos for environmental conservation, ethical basis of environmental education and finally the destination of an environmental education.

TRANSCRIPTION

CONCEPT OF ETHICS

Ethics is the discipline that examines one's moral standards or the moral standards of a society. It asks how these standards are applicable to human life and whether these standards are reasonable or unreasonable. It means whether they are supported by good reasons or poor ones. Thus it can be said that human being starts learning ethics when he or she takes the moral standards absorbed from family, friends and religious places.

Ethicists use the term ethics to refer primarily to the study of morality as chemists use the term chemistry to refer to a study of the property of chemical substances. Although ethics deals with morality but it is not same as morality. In fact ethics is a kind of investigation where as morality is the subject matter that the ethicist investigates. Moral standards include the norms which are used to judge an action as morally right or wrong. They are also used to place the values for a person, object, event and idea. Ethicists have suggested five characteristics of moral standards. These are;

First, moral standards deal with matters which are dangerous or beneficial to human beings.

Second, moral standards are not established or changed by authoritative bodies. The validity of moral standards rests on the adequacy of the reasons that support and justify them.

Third, moral standards should be preferred to other values including self interest.

Fourth, Moral standards are based on impartial considerations.

And fifth, moral standards are associated with special emotions and a special vocabulary.

ECOLOGICAL ETHICS

An ecological system is an interrelated and interdependent set of living and nonliving components of the environment. Living components include plants, animals and microorganisms. A lake is an aquatic ecosystem which is made up of nonliving materials like water, soil, air etc.; animals like fish, snakes, small aquatic organisms; and aquatic plants like algae, lotus, water chestnut etc. Here the fish depends on small aquatic organisms, which in turn live off decaying plant and fish waste products. Various components of an ecosystem are interrelated therefore the activities of one of its parts affect the activities of other parts. Because, various components are interdependent, the survival of each part depends on the survival of the other parts. For example we require oxygen for our respiration which in turn gives energy to survive as well as to work. In the environment, oxygen is produced by photosynthesis which takes place in the green pigments of the plants. The removal of plants specially the trees will reduce the production of oxygen which ultimately affects the survival of life. We human beings are the part of the larger ecosystem. We are more developed and comparatively more advanced creatures of the earth; therefore it is our moral responsibility to protect the welfare of human and nonhuman parts of this ecosystem. This philosophy is often called as ECOLOGICAL ETHICS OR DEEP ECOLOGY. Ecological ethics is based on

the idea that nonhuman parts of the environment deserve to be protected for their own sake, regardless of whether they benefit human being. Many supporters of this philosophy have extended their views in these points:

1. The well-being and flourishing of human and nonhuman life on the earth have value in themselves. These values are independent of the usefulness of the nonhuman world for human purposes.
2. Richness and diversity of life forms contribute to the realization of these values and are also values in themselves.
3. Humans have no right to reduce this richness.
4. The flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantial decrease of human population. The flourishing of nonhuman life requires such a decrease.
5. The present human interference with the nonhuman world is excessive and the situation is rapidly becoming worst.
6. Therefore the policies must be changed to protect the ecosystem.
7. The ideological change is mainly that of appreciating life quality, rather than adhering to an increasingly higher standard of living.
8. Those who subscribe to these points have an obligation directly or indirectly to participate in the attempt to implement the necessary changes.

Thus an ecological ethicist would claim that the welfare of at least some nonhumans is intrinsically valuable. It means environment is worthwhile in itself. It is not instrument to be used in some way as means to an end. Because of this intrinsic value we humans have a duty to respect and protect them.

“Every form of life has value regardless of its worth to human beings.”

-- Earth Charter

MORAL THEORIES SUPPORTING NATURE

We have three theories which are plausible systems to natural components and beings. These are:

Utilitarianism or Consequentialism, Virtue Ethics, and Deontology.

Utilitarianism puts a model of humane treatment of non humane life with a view that the pain suffered by nonhumans is too much. If calculating the nonhuman pains is not sufficient then it is difficult to define non human flourishing. In this condition the concept of Higher Pleasure can be applied to animals or ecosystems as a standard for

sustainable conditions under which they flourish. Here it is important to note that the flourishing of nonhuman being should not be judged as flourishing of human beings. This is absolutely true when the nonhuman being in entire ecosystem likely to be jeopardized by development that will enhance human survival and pleasure.

In virtue ethics, moral ground is higher and provides a perspective from which the value of environment is judged from apart from their use for human being. Because of this the virtue of ethics is more promising. Therefore children should be taught to value the environment as an expression and extension of what is best of their character. Without an appreciation of and respect for nature with moral and aesthetic seriousness our own flourishing is not possible. In fact our behavior towards nature reveals our human traits like sensitivity, humility and gratitude.

According to deontology point of view, the natural beings should be granted the status of 'persons' in the same way in which human beings are persons. This can be done only with competent, adult human representatives, similar to the ways in which the human personhood of children and adults of diminished capacity is represented by parents and guardians. Mere stewardship or trusteeship over ecosystems will not be sufficient to protect them. If the ecosystem is getting the status of a person, then depriving it from the life or assaulting its inhabitants would be of equal crimes of murder or assault committed against human beings. There are reasons for granting the status of persons to nonhuman beings like:

1. Ecosystems and their components are living beings like human beings. Therefore they are entitled to the same rights as human beings are entitled to have.
2. All the living beings have some state of affairs, primarily their ongoing life, or their sickness and death as natural beings. Thus natural beings have positive interests as do human beings.
3. The independence of natural beings is analogous to the independence of a human child not like a fetus who requires the support of particular individual.
4. A number of human beings are compassionate towards natural beings as they do for other humans. They feel sufferings when the natural beings are injured and are happy when they flourish. Compassion is a motive to curtail sufferings and promote the flourishing of natural beings.
5. The natural beings suffer when they are injured or destroyed similarly to human beings. This is an important qualification for admission to the realm of persons because the one secular basis for universal human rights is the capacity to suffer.

The most important values of human development and flourishing are granting personhood to ecosystems and natural beings.

INDIAN ETHOS FOR ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION

It has been an ancient Indian tradition to protect the natural components and resources. Indians have always valued mountains, forests, trees and several species of plants and animals. Indian Hindu Religion and tribal culture observes the images of Gods and Goddesses in natural components. The peepal tree is considered as another form of Lord Krishna. In Maharashtra the Banyan tree is venerated once a year by tying a thread around it as a symbol of respect. The tulsi plant is grown in every house, in India.

People value certain species of plants as they are valuable for their fruits and flowers. The mango tree is protected for its fruits. The mahua tree is considered as valuable by tribal people for its edible flowers to prepare alcohol and oil from its seeds. Many plants, shrubs and herbs are used as medicinal resources by Indian people. A number of animal species are venerated as the vahan or vehicle of different gods and goddesses on which they are said to travel through cosmos.

As per Indian mythology, the elephant is associated with Ganesha. The elephant headed Ganesha is also linked with rat. Lord Vishnu is associated with eagle. Lord Rama is having relationship with monkeys. The Sun god Surya rides a horse and has a superb chariot on which he moves through the sky. The lion is associated with Goddess Durga. Further cow is associated with Lord Krishna and snake is associated with Lord Shiva and Vishnu. The Swan has relationship with Saraswati. Lord Vishnu's incarnations have been represented as taking various animal forms like a fish, a tortoise, a boar as well as a half man half lion form. Plants also have religious significance. Tulsi is linked to Lakshmi and Krishna. The Tulsi plant is associated to the worship of one's own ancestors. Lord Buddha attained enlightenment under the Peepal tree. The conventional societies of the past showed the ethical values of these components of nature and conveyed the message to protect the nature.

THE ETHICAL BASIS OF ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

The Honorable Supreme Court of India has ordered that all the young individuals at school and college level be educated to course on environment. This course is not only required to provide knowledge, but also for the development of skills and actions of young individuals to protect the environment. This can be done by creating love for nature. Today our educational system has been designed in such a way so that the seeds of the love for nature can be germinated. Today it has become essential to develop a value system based on environmental concern. This system is required to develop a thought in citizens of the country that the human survival is not possible without a balanced structure and functioning of nature. It has been our culture to extend high regards to almost every component of the nature. This philosophy is still relevant.

Once Mahatma Gandhi said that, 'Man's needs but not greed can be supported by our Earth'. In fact Mahatma Gandhi had deep insights for conserving the natural resources. He put an example of his own to teach others so that they will realize the value of natural resources. His simple way of living conveyed a message that simplistic living could save the earth's resources.

Shantiniketan, a university which was founded by Shri Ravindranath Tagore was based on environmental philosophy. Tagore's philosophy focused for a harmonious relationship between humans and environment. He thought that young people must be exposed to nature. According to him the learning centers should be established in remote forests and celebrations of nature should be done through music, dance, drama and poetry. He started Vriksha Ropan way back in 1928. In fact the philosophy of Shantiniketan is now accepted as the route to environmental education. Today we have moved our self quite far from the nature. This is one of the important reasons about our ignorance with respect to value of nature for our survival.

The Indian philosophy of Karma is based on the belief that the soul moves from one form of life to other. This idea brings the concept of oneness among all forms of life. Ahinsa or nonviolence towards life provides our country its basic philosophy which was propounded by Hindu Philosophers and later supported by sages like Buddha, Mahavir, and Mahatma Gandhi. This brings the notion that animals are not supposed to be viewed purely for their utility value but as a part of the earth's oneness which is linked with other forms of life. Therefore, at present we are required to understand value of harmony with nature to develop the respect for nature's great oneness. This can be possible only if we have an effective system for environmental education.

THE DESTINATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

Every educational system is required to develop the human being. If education is doing the job of all round development of human personality then there is no need of instituting the environmental education because a balanced personality loves the nature and never does anything which is against the existence natural components. But the present scenario seems quite different. Whatever the reasons may be our educational system not doing whatever it should do. As a result so called educated society of India is not having harmony with nature and local environment. Therefore we need an effective environmental education which can develop rationale thinking for nature, a positive feeling for natural components and phenomena, and right action for the protection of local environment. Finally the environmental education should inculcate the orchestral form of these three aspects – thinking, feeling and doing for nature by the youth of country, to make them value oriented citizens.

GLOSSARY

1.	Ethics	:	Ethics is the discipline that examines one's moral standards or the moral standards of the society.
2.	Morality	:	Morality is the standard that an individual or a group has about what is right or wrong and good or bad.
3.	Ethicists	:	Persons who study morality.
4.	Ecological System	:	A interrelated and inter dependent set of living and nonliving components of the environment.
5.	Ecological ethics	:	It is a philosophy that nonhuman parts of the environment deserve to be protected for their own sake, regardless of whether they benefit human being.
6.	Utilitarianism	:	A model of human treatment of nonhuman life.
7.	Virtue ethics	:	Value of environment is judged from a part from their use for human being.
8.	Deontology	:	The natural beings should be granted the status of persons in the same way in which human beings are the persons.

FAQs

Q1. Define ethics.

Ans. Ethics is the discipline that examines one's moral standards or the moral standards of a society.

Q2. What is morality?

Ans. Morality is the standard that an individual or a group has about what is right or wrong and good or bad.

Q3. Write the characteristics moral standards as suggested by ethicists.

Ans. Ethicists have suggested five characteristics of moral standards.

These are;

- A. First, moral standards deal with matters which are dangerous or beneficial to human beings.
- B. Second, moral standards are not established or changed by authoritative bodies. The validity of moral standards rests on the adequacy of the reasons that support and justify them.
- C. Third, moral standards should be preferred to other values including self interest.
- D. Fourth, Moral standards are based on impartial considerations.
- E. And fifth, moral standards are associated with special emotions and a special vocabulary.

Q4. What is an ecosystem?

Ans. An ecological system is an interrelated and interdependent set of living and nonliving components of the environment.

Q5. What is ecological ethics?

Ans. Ecological ethics is based on the idea that nonhuman parts of the environment deserve to be protected for their own sake, regardless of whether they benefit human being.

Q6. What are the reasons which support the philosophy of ecological ethics?

Ans. The well-being and flourishing of human and nonhuman life

1. On the earth have value in themselves. These values are independent of the usefulness of the nonhuman world for human purposes.
2. Richness and diversity of life forms contribute to the realization of these values and are also values in themselves.
3. Humans have no right to reduce this richness.
4. The flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantial decrease of human population. The flourishing of nonhuman life requires such a decrease.
5. The present human interference with the nonhuman world is excessive and the situation is rapidly becoming worst.
6. Therefore the policies must be changed to protect the ecosystem.
7. The ideological change is mainly that of appreciating life quality, rather than adhering to an increasingly higher standard of living.
8. Those who subscribe to these points have an obligation directly or indirectly to participate in the attempt to implement the necessary changes.

Q7. What is utilitarianism?

Ans. Utilitarianism puts a model of humane treatment of non humane life with a view that the pain suffered by nonhumans is too much. If calculating the nonhuman pains is not sufficient then it is difficult to define non human flourishing. In this condition the concept of Higher Pleasure can be applied to animals or ecosystems as a standard for sustainable conditions under which they flourish. Here it is important to note that the flourishing of nonhuman being should not be judged as flourishing of human beings. This is absolutely true when the nonhuman being in entire ecosystem likely to be jeopardized by development that will enhance human survival and pleasure.

Q8. What is virtue ethics?

Ans. In virtue ethics, moral ground is higher and provides a perspective from which the value of environment is judged from apart from their use for human being. Because of this the virtue of ethics is more promising. Therefore children should be taught to value the environment as an expression and extension of what is best of their character. Without an appreciation of and respect for nature with moral and aesthetic seriousness our own flourishing is not possible. In fact our behavior towards nature reveals our human traits like sensitivity, humility and gratitude.

Q9. What is deontology?

Ans. According to deontology point of view, the natural beings should be granted the status of 'persons' in the same way in which human beings are persons.

Q10. Why the nonhuman beings should by grant of the status of human beings.

- Ans. 1. Ecosystems and their components are living beings like human beings. Therefore they are entitled to the same rights as human beings are entitled to have.
2. All the living beings have some state of affairs, primarily their ongoing life, or their sickness and death as natural beings. Thus natural beings have positive interests as do human beings.
3. The independence of natural beings is analogous to the independence of a human child not like a fetus who requires the support of particular individual.

4. A number of human beings are compassionate towards natural beings as they do for other humans. They feel sufferings when the natural beings are injured and are happy when they flourish. Compassion is a motive to curtail sufferings and promote the flourishing of natural beings.
5. The natural beings suffer when they are injured or destroyed similarly to human beings. This is an important qualification for admission to the realm of persons because the one secular basis for universal human rights is the capacity to suffer.

Q11. What is value of plants, animals and birds in Indian philosophy?

Ans. It has been an ancient Indian tradition to protect the natural components and resources. Indians have always valued mountains, forests, trees and several species of plants and animals. Indian Hindu Religion and tribal culture observes the images of Gods and Goddesses in natural components. The peepal tree is considered as another form of Lord Krishna. In Maharashtra the Banyan tree is venerated once a year by tying a thread around it as a symbol of respect. The tulsi plant is grown in every house, in India.

People value certain species of plants as they are valuable for their fruits and flowers. The mango tree is protected for its fruits. The mahua tree is considered as valuable by tribal people for its edible flowers to prepare alcohol and oil from its seeds. Many plants, shrubs and herbs are used as medicinal resources by Indian people. A number of animal species are venerated as the vahan or vehicle of different gods and goddesses on which they are said to travel through cosmos.

As per Indian mythology, the elephant is associated with Ganesha. The elephant headed Ganesha is also linked with rat. Lord Vishnu is associated with eagle. Lord Rama is having relationship with monkeys. The Sun god Surya rides a horse and has a superb chariot on which he moves through the sky. The lion is associated with Goddess Durga. Further cow is associated with Lord Krishna and snake is associated with Lord Shiva and Vishnu. The Swan has relationship with Saraswati. Lord Vishnu's incarnations have been represented as taking various animal forms like a fish, a tortoise, a boar as well as a half man half lion form. Plants also have religious significance. Tulsi is linked to Lakshmi and Krishna. The Tulsi plant is associated to the worship of one's own ancestors. Lord Buddha attained enlightenment under the Peepal tree. The conventional societies of the past showed the ethical values of these components of nature and conveyed the message to protect the nature.

Q12. What is order of Supreme Court for environmental education?

Ans. The Honorable Supreme Court of India has ordered that all the young individuals at school and college level be educated to course on environment.

Q13. What is the view of Mahatma Gandhi for environment?

Ans. Once Mahatma Gandhi said that, 'Man's needs but not greed can be supported by our Earth'. In fact Mahatma Gandhi had deep insights for conserving the natural resources. He put an example of his own to teach others so that they will realize the value of natural resources. His simple way of living conveyed a message that simplistic living could save the earth's resources.

Q14. Write the ideas of shri Ravindranath Tagore on environment?

Ans. Shantiniketan, a university which was founded by Shri Ravindranath Tagore was based on environmental philosophy. Tagore's philosophy focused for a harmonious relationship between humans and environment. He thought that young people must be exposed to nature. According to him the learning centers should be established in remote forests and celebrations of nature should be done through music, dance, drama and poetry. He started Vriksha Ropan way back in 1928. In fact the philosophy of Shantiniketan is now accepted as the route to environmental education.

Q15. What is the idea of oneness?

Ans. The Indian philosophy of Karma is based on the belief that the soul moves from one form of life to other. This idea brings the concept of oneness among all forms of life.