
An Ecofeminist and Third World Critique of Deep Ecology

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Abstract

Deep Ecology, as a movement in environmental ethics, advocated for recognition of some sort of 'intrinsic value' of 'Mother Nature'. This paper seeks to critically analyse the nuances of the arguments forwarded by the philosophers associated with the deep ecology movement in light of the criticism they have received. The paper limits itself only to the criticisms forwarded by the ecofeminists and the so called 'Third World' as it is the thinkers of these schools who have led the most scathing attack the deep ecological worldview. Unearthing these debates this paper also seeks to evaluate the contributions of the deep ecologists in addressing some of the most contemporary concerns related to the environment. *Firstly* the paper seeks to provide a general understanding about idea of deep ecology. *Secondly* it traces the evolution of environmental ethics. *Thirdly* it deals with the emergence of deep ecology and seeks to describe what its proponents have advocated for. *Fourthly* the paper seeks to provide an understanding of the location of the issue of population control in the propositions forwarded by the philosophers and what measures were suggested to achieve the same. *Fifthly* it deals with the criticism advanced against the proponents of deep ecology. *Finally* the paper seeks to evaluate the contributions of deep ecologists to environmental protection in light of these debates.

Keywords: Deep Ecology, Ecofeminism, Cultural Relativism, Moral Standing, Environmental Ethics.

Introduction

Despite deployment of environmental protection laws and policies, and initiating global movements, the earth not only continues to suffer from environmental crises, but also experiences even greater challenges. Cleanup of air and water pollution, protecting the endangered species, slowing down the

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global warming, addressing the issue of resource depletion, and so on simultaneously have become the primary issues for the world today. For many environmentalists during the dawn of environmental ethics in 1970s, the core issue with environmental crises was not the failing legislations, or institutions, or individuals' day-to-day behaviour, but the very ethical thinking towards nature and non-human beings. Environmental ethics, in contradistinction to other ethics like business ethics and professional ethics, advocated for extending moral standing to non-human entities as well, in relation to humans. Deep Ecology, in particular, as a new approach, is one of such endeavours, that advocated for recognition of some sort of 'intrinsic value' of 'Mother Nature'. Besides, its proponents have suggested pogroms like human population reduction by active means to protect the environment. The deep ecologists have faced scathing criticism for their ideas. They have been regarded to be proponents of a patriarchal program by ecofeminists. Drawing parallels between the sufferings of women and nature, they have criticized the deep ecological philosophies. Third World critics like Ramachandra Guha have regarded them as 'elitists' and their theory as essentially western. This paper seeks to analyse the nuances of the arguments forwarded by the deep ecologists and also the ecofeminists and the third world thinkers, articulate the debate between them and critically evaluate the contribution of deep ecology as a movement in environmental ethics. This paper limits itself to the criticisms forwarded by the ecofeminists and the so-called 'Third World' critics only, as they have been the staunchest critics of the movement.

Deep Ecology: The Idea

Environmental ethics, in contradistinction to medical ethics or bio ethics, emerged as an expansionist project, seeking to expand the classes of moral patients.³ It sought to extend moral standing to entities other than humans, in relation to human beings.⁴ One of the movements towards that direction is 'Deep Ecology'. Deep Ecology, also known as 'New Ecology'⁵ was initially developed by Norwegian philosopher, Arne Næss, who was advocating for recognizing inherent value for nature and other living beings. This worldview considers human being as part of the whole ecosystem and denies instrumental and materialistic utility of nature for the sake of good and well-being of humans. Rather, it calls for recognition of some sort of inherent value of nature, which is independent of any what value it holds to humans. It resulted in a paradigm shift in natural movements and posed profound challenges to traditional world-view (anthropocentrism, as a dominant, yet destructive

³ Gregory Cooper, 'Teleology and Environmental Ethics' (1998) 35(2) American Philosophical Quarterly 195 <www.jstor.org/stable/20009930> accessed 5 Feb 2019.

⁴ *ibid*

⁵ Ramachandra Guha, 'Radical American Environmentalism and Wilderness Preservation: A Third World Critique', (1989) 11(1) Environmental Ethics 1 <www.uky.edu/~rsand1/china2017/library/Guha.pdf> accessed 24 November 2018.

world-view) by: *first*, questioning the established moral superiority of human beings to other species and *then*, investigating the possibility of rational arguments for assigning intrinsic value to natural environment and other non-human species. Following framing this world-view, the proponents attempted to restructure the modern human societies in accordance with this brand of ideology. Deep Ecology contends that the natural world is a settled balance of complex interrelations in which the existence of one living being is dependent on other living beings. By distinguishing between shallow ecology (a human-centric and economic approach to study the ecosystem) and deep ecology, the latter's proponents have raised deeper questions and have sought for a deeper paradigm shift in human's thinking and understanding the natural environment.

This world-view that aimed at relieving 'Mother Earth' from the grave crises that it is faced with along with its proponents, were widely criticized too. Its more militant proponents went to the level of advocating measures like active human population reduction. It has faced staunch opposition from humanists, feminists and has also been regarded to be anti-industrial capitalist civilization in particular. Deep ecology as well as the activists in the 'Earth First!' (a radical environmentalist group adhering to the deep ecological arguments) have been labelled as sexists, misanthropists, fascists, elitists, and racists who are trying to modernize Malthusianism and publicly advocating for genocide.⁶ Feminists allege that the predominantly male proponents of the theory have completely ignored the fact of oppression of women and the question of general domination by some humans by others. Extending this analysis, ecofeminists draw parallels between oppression of nature and oppression of women. The critics from the so-called third world have called out the elitist nature of the theories, designed to preserve wilderness experiences only for the economically better off classes. To acquit these charges, the later exponents of deep ecology argue that these critics are biased and have failed to thoroughly comprehend the true meaning of deep ecology or its 'real work', which includes its rituals, bioregionalism, defending ecosystem, and restoring human damaged ecosystem.

The Early Development of Environmental Ethics

Humans who had played the greatest part in environmental degradation throughout their history and civilization, came to understand the depth of the environmental crisis during 1950s and 60s and later in 70s. Thanks to industrial revolution and economic growth in countries all around the world, people started using and exploiting natural resources and transforming those resources into products they wanted. In the process of transforming trees into

⁶ George Bradford, *How Deep is Deep Ecology* (Times Change Press 1989) 23 <<https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/george-bradford-how-deep-is-deep-ecology.pdf>> accessed 17 December 2018.

furniture and homes, they cut down forests; in the process of creating energy, they performed mining and burned mine coals to generate electricity; in the process of building economies, they put pollutants into oceans and the sky. A lot of environmentalists like Thomas Berry, Cormac Cullian have held the industrial revolution and the mechanisation of human life as one of the major causes behind the rapid environmental degradation. Till the 50s there was very little consciousness to protect the environment and hence, little or almost no protections were put in place to preserve the environment. Majority of the populace had no understanding of the harm they were inflicting on the environment. At the dawn of environmental ethics, however, various theories were put forward by the scholars, and different methods and approaches were put into practice. The initial goal of the environmental movement was to educate Rachel Carson's book 'Silent Spring'. This book was the turning point, selling millions of copies nationwide. Carson's critical analysis of the overuse of pesticides, alarmed people all over the world about major environmental problems, specifically the harm of pesticides on both local ecosystems and their own health.⁷ This led to development of many international instruments and legal framework as well as many movements all around the globe.

Lynn White's, in one of his essays, contended that Judeo-Christian thinking had resulted in overexploitation of the nature wherein humans are considered superior to all other forms of life and that all of the natural environment has been created only for the use of humans. He also added that the Church fathers and the Bible itself are the exponents and propagandists of human's supremacy over all their surroundings.⁸ Only one year later, Paul Ehrlich published his controversial book (1968) in which he alarmed that overpopulation threatened the purview of planetary life-support system. In 1972 another major study, 'The Limits to Growth' was published by a group of researchers in which they called for a fundamental change in values associated with environment and that there was an urgent necessity for developing a new ethics with relation to environment.⁹ Richard Routley, an Australian philosopher, in his work, 'The Land Ethics' argued that anthropocentrism imbedded 'the western super-ethics' which is, in effect, 'human Chauvinism'. To him, this view was nothing but another form of class

⁷ Mark Stoll, 'Rachel Carson's, Silent Spring: A Book that Changed the World' (2012) Environment & Society Portal <www.environmentandsociety.org/exhibitions/silent-spring/legacy-rachel-carsons-silent-spring> accessed 2 December 2018.

⁸ Lynn White, Jr, 'The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis', (1967) 155(3767) Science, New Series 1205 <www.jstor.org/stable/1720120> accessed 5 August 2019.

⁹ Donella H. Meadows et al, 'The Limits to Growth' (1972) A Report for the Club of Rome's Project on the Predicament of Mankind (Universe Books, New York 1972) 9 <www.donellameadows.org/wp-content/userfiles/Limits-to-Growth-digital-scan-version.pdf> accessed 5 January 2019.

chauvinism that discriminates against those classes which are lesser privileged.¹⁰

Southern California University professor, Christopher Stone in 1972, in an essay recommended that trees as well as other natural objects must be provided with an equal standing in law, i.e. to be recognized as persons before law and hence, be provided with some rights of their own.¹¹ He further advocated for the guardianship of such entities by environmental organizations who could move the court for the enforcement of their rights as guardians or someone *in loco parentis*. He contended that if mountains, forests and tress are given this standing in law, they, afterwards, could be represented for the protection of their rights by groups like the Sierra Club. Any compensation received for distress due to human activities then, would be used for the benefit of that entity.¹² As a response to the proposal of Prof. Stone, Joel Feinberg contended that only those entities which one can regard to be possessive of some sort of interest can possess moral standing. By this, he meant animals and unborn species, which due to their interests can be represented in legal proceedings and moral debates.¹³ Now, to whom the moral standing may be extended or not, was a topic of constant debate amongst various philosophers. These legal, political and ethical debates on environmental issues wherein whether or not a new philosophical underpinning is required gave birth to schisms between the believers of different school of thoughts. The debate between ‘realists’ and ‘fundamentalists’, for instance was whether to reform environment, cooperate with business and governmental organizations to gradually influence the policies or to overthrow capitalism and liberal individualism, as the main accused of environmental devastation. The result of these divisions was the distinction between shallow and deep environmental movements in 1970s.¹⁴

¹⁰ Richard Routley, ‘Is There a Need for a New, an Environmental Ethic?’ (1973) Proceedings of the XVth World Congress of Philosophy <<https://iseethics.files.wordpress.com/2013/02/routley-richard-is-there-a-need-for-a-new-an-environmental-ethic-original.pdf>> accessed 17 December 2018.

¹¹ Ujal Kumar Mookherjee, ‘Extending Moral Standing to Environmental Entities- Whom and How? Concerns and Considerations’ (2019) 4(1) BiLD Law Journal 45 <<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1JDIBwwY-IIBwAptXR4s4TEPdxEMoK-VR/view?usp=drivesdk>> accessed 25 July 2019.

¹² Christopher D. Stone, ‘Should Trees Have Standing? – Towards Legal Rights for Natural Objects’ (1972) 45 Southern California Law review 450.

¹³ Joel Feinberg, ‘The Rights of Animals and Unborn Generations’ in William T. Blackstone (ed), *Philosophy and Environmental Crisis* (The University of Georgia Press 1974).

¹⁴ Bill Deval, ‘The Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement 1960-2000- A Review’ (Spring 2001) 6(1) Ethics and Environment 19 <www.jstor.org/stable/40339002> accessed 29 July 2019.

Emergence and Tenets of Deep Ecology

Although the word ‘ecology’ first appeared in the English language in 1873,¹⁵ deep ecology emerged almost a century later as part of the value theory of environmental ethics primarily concerning with environmental values. As per Richard Sylvan it was presented as metaphysics in the beginning, as an awareness raising movement and even a sort of pantheistic religion. Exponents of this value theory view it as metaphysical as essence which assigns natural philosophy of human beings’ place in the nature.¹⁶ On the other hand, it was also understood as matter of deep experiences of a religious cast obtained in or through nature. The most important idea in deep ecology is that it is deep questioning; and ultimately self-realization and biocentrism, thus, the wholeness and integrity of person/planet altogether with biological egalitarianism. In spite of coinage of the term by Arne Næss, many deep ecologists give the credit to Aldo Leopold, American ecologist who in his essay ‘Land Ethic’ succinctly expressed such a deep ecological world-view. However, Næss calls his brand of deep ecology as, Ecosophy T (‘the T stands for his hut in mountains Norway’), and emphasizes two norms of deep ecology— biocentrism and self-realization.¹⁷ Self-realization by human beings is regarded by Næss as the only probable solution to him, to rescue environment from wanton degradation. Næss also called for preservation of species and wilderness, even though preservation of wilderness would not lead to any direct advantage to human beings.

There are, as Næss highlights, several tenets of deep ecology. First, every living being has intrinsic value, and a basic part of this value stems from the richness and diversity that natural environment provides to the ecosystem as a whole. Second, diversity as well as biodiversity within ecosystems is part of what gives our lives value. Third, human beings have no right to reduce this richness and diversity of the nature, except what he postulates, to satisfy their vital human needs. By vital human needs, Næss means the things which are crucial to survival (water, air, food, shelter and some other basic resources essential for human health). Fourth, humans’ lives and cultures’ flourishing is compatible with a substantial decrease of population and that flourishing of non-human lives requires such a decrease. Fifth, human’s interference with nature is excessive, and if continues, the circumstance will worsen. Therefore, the fight to preserve wilderness or near-wilderness areas should continue and more attention should be paid on the general ecological functioning of these areas. Sixth, the policies addressing environmental concerns should hence be changed. Such policies which to a large extent affect ideological, economic

¹⁵ White (n 8) 1203.

¹⁶ Richard Sylvan, ‘A Critique of Deep Ecology’ (1985) 40(1) *Radical Philosophy*, <www.radicalphilosophy.com/article/a-critique-of-deep-ecology> accessed 17 December 2018.

¹⁷ Martin J. Haigh, ‘Land Reclamation and Deep Ecology: In Search of a More Meaningful Physical Geography’ (2002) 34(3) *AREA* 247 <www.jstor.org/stable/20004241> accessed 29 July 2019.

and technological structures are the reflection of anthropocentric approach and in order to bring about sustainable change within ecosystem, these should be mainstreamed for the benefit of ecosystem. Seventh, the ideological change should be accompanied by promoting quality of life. This will take place by residing in conditions of inherent value, than adhering to a higher standard of living. Finally, the subscribers should be assigned with moral obligation to put effort to implement the necessary changes.¹⁸

Therefore, humans need to consume less and destroy less, because if not, non-human life will not flourish as it should. By developing and elaborating these tenets, he meant the world under the new philosophical world-view should give the nature an intrinsic value, because the existing biodiversity gives our lives value. To respect that value, humans only need to fulfil their vital needs and sacrifice the non-vital ones and eventually, to let these values flourish, it would be essential to cut down human population. What Næss argued was that humans are using resources in a way that is not contributing to their vital needs, while using these resources is interfering with flourishing of non-human life, such as plastic or energy use, destruction of land or use of land for agricultural purposes, clearing of forest. That is incompatible with the flourishing of non-human life. Therefore, it is an obligation to adopt policies that protect the vital needs of all living things, while sacrificing non-vital needs.

Deep Ecology and the Issue of Population Control

Næss advocated a form of egalitarianism that flourishing of human life was not more important than the lives of other environmental entities. On the contrary, he declared that humans' lives and cultures' flourishing required a substantial decrease of the human population, and the same is also conducive for the lives of non-human environmental entities. He argued that no single species of living being had more of the right to live and unfold than any other species.¹⁹

Næss and George Sessions in their 'Basic Principles of Deep Ecology' declared that the flourishing of non-human lives requires a substantial decrease in human population. This, along with other principles of deep ecology which are yearning for a revolution in education, politics, philosophy and ethics have given rise to numerous critics and have resulted in revulsion against the demands of ecological ethics.

One of earliest works on population control was done by Thomas Robert Malthus, a Christian minister and a political economist. He focused on the

¹⁸ Mookherjee (n11) 52.

¹⁹ Haigh (n 17) 247.

issue of food production and population growth imbalance. According to him, population tends to grow geometrically (Geometric Progression), while the food supply growth happens only in arithmetic progression, and as a result, the number of populations outstrips food supply. This creates the imbalance. However, he says that the imbalance would be solved in itself by what he calls as ‘natural checks’.²⁰ He further asserts that the future of humankind, unless we take some positive steps for population reduction over and above the natural checking mechanisms, is going to be disastrous. He proposes some measures like late marriages, celibacy and family planning. To Malthus, repression of population growth has been and would continue to exist in every society.

Malthus’s gained support and his theory then started to be used as an argument in the efforts to ameliorate the degradation of nature during the latter part of the 20th century. ‘The Population Bomb’ written by Paul Ehrlich²¹ and a report for the Club of Rome ‘Limits to Growth’ are a few examples. The latter was written by team of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.²² The prediction in both the works was disaster for humanity as the rate of growth of human population would outstrip the resource supply. It also went on to make the prediction that in 1970’s and 80’s hundreds of people will starve to death. The radical solutions provided for in the books bears testament to the fact that the theory of Thomas Robert Malthus had been rekindled.²³

It is believed that Næss and Sessions drew inspiration from the works of Malthus, especially in terms of human population control. They extended Malthus’s arguments for removal of the food production and consumption imbalance, to protect the environment. Næss, for example, advocated human population reduction so that the natural environment may flourish. He further called for recognition of some sort of intrinsic value for non-human beings and the nature.²⁴ Although he did not explicitly mention to what extent— either one-fourth, or one-third, or half of the population should be decreased, he uses the phrase ‘substantial decrease’, which connotes the need to decrease the population by a handsome margin.

²⁰ Hans E. Jensen, ‘The Development of T.R. Malthus’s Institutional Approach to the Cure of Poverty: From Punishment of the Poor to Investment in Their Human Capital’ (1999) 57(4) (Special Issue on Economic Justice) *Review of Social Economy* 454 <www.jstor.org/stable/29770033> accessed 18 January 2019.

²¹ Sarah Orleans Reed, ‘The Publication of Paul Ehrlich’s *The Population Bomb* by the Sierra Club, 1968: Wilderness-Thinking, Neo-Malthusianism, and Anti-Humanism’ (A thesis for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts, Wesleyan University 2008) <https://wescholar.wesleyan.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=&httpsredir=1&article=1064&context=etd_hon_theses> accessed 15 December 2018.

²² Meadows (n 9).

²³ Bradford (n 6) 12.

²⁴ Mookherjee (n 11).

Having said that, it must be remembered that the deep ecologists, though were more or less unanimous in the diagnosis of the problem, i.e. degradation of the environment, they were far from uniform in providing prescriptions for the solution of the problem.²⁵ Some like Næss himself prescribed turning to Buddhism as one of the probable solutions for the problems.²⁶

To a vast majority of the deep ecologists, reduction in growth of population was not the only solution. A serious decline in the living human population was also deemed necessary. The answer to how to accomplish this substantial decrease lies at the heart of his other basic part of Næss's platform: *policy change*. This change should include economics, politics, education, philosophy and religion, hence a wholesome revolution throughout human's modern civilization. Since change in policies does not necessarily lead to behavioural change, deep ecologists are striving to implement it through usage of force. As Mark Fellenz noted, the proposals forwarded by the deep ecologists reminded him of Nietzsche, and also Paul Ehrlich. The former diagnosed humans as a disease on the skin of the earth, while the later considered overpopulation to be a cancer which had to be cut, instead of cured.²⁷

Some other deep ecologists have put across even more radical proposals on the basis of this arguments and approaches which have been criticized as act of genocide.²⁸ The theory of population reduction or stabilization at a certain rate of nine billion or more radically eight billion is one of the proposals. 90% population decrease proposed by Poet Gary Synder in order to gain the pristine environment is another one. Paul Ehrlich's study, 'The Population Bomb' as an early work can be summarized as: a) inevitability of mass starvation in the near future; b) increasing death and misery due to progressive environmental deterioration – as a result of connection between damage caused to environment due to human population and food policy; and c) existence of high level of carbon dioxide, water scarcity, abundance in transportation system, factories and pesticides as a common cause for environmental and food crisis. Ehrlich's concluding argument was that it would be better to control the population and reduce the birth rate, since it is more similar like a cancer. Therefore, the rational way is to cut out the cancer, instead of treating the symptoms.²⁹ Stijin Koenraads, argues that since human

²⁵ Robert Sessions, 'Deep Ecology versus Ecofeminism: Healthy Differences or Incompatible Philosophies?' (1991) 6(1) *Hypatia, Ecological Feminism* 92 <www.jstor.org/stable/3810035> accessed 26 July 2019.

²⁶ *ibid*

²⁷ Stijin Koenraads, 'Reduction of the Global Human Population: A Rectificatory Argument based on Environmental Considerations' (Master's Thesis, Linköping University | Department of Culture and Communication 2016) <<https://liu.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:934535/FULLTEXT02.pdf>> accessed 18 December 2018.

²⁸ Bradford (n 6) 29.

²⁹ *ibid*

have unjustly harmed themselves and other living entities, and hence, population reduction was the only way in which rectification of such mistakes and harms done can be made.³⁰ In his essay, Koenraads also proposes two methods (active and passive) methods of human population reduction, pretty much in line with what Malthus had propagated. The examples of active method include: contraception, voluntary or involuntary sterilization, sexual abstinence, allowing euthanasia, large-scale homicide, and small family role model. All the same, the examples of passive method are: refusing to perform life-supporting treatment on patients, refraining from taking precautionary measures of natural disasters, refusing to hire new personnel in branches of police force and close national borders in order to prevent entering foreign nationals crossing them.³¹

Criticism of Deep Ecology: What do the Ecofeminists and Third World Critics say about Deep Ecology?

Since its coinage and delineation in 1972, deep ecology has been severely criticized by scholars and thinkers representing from different schools of thoughts including social ecology, liberal democracy and ecofeminism. There is much to discuss and explore the debates on deep ecology and its relation to and the subsequent debates with social liberalism, social ecology, ecofeminism and cultural relativism. The focus in this article is, however, confined to the debates of deep ecologist and the ecofeminism and the cultural relativist contentions against the propositions of the deep ecologists. The reason for focusing on the aforesaid two streams of criticism is the simple fact that the most scathing attack against the philosophy of deep ecology has been led by thinkers belonging to these two schools.

Deep Ecology and Ecofeminism

Many deep ecologists call their perspective alternatively ‘eco-centrism’ or ‘biocentrism’. The intention is to convey an idea of ecosystem-centric or life-centered value systems. All the same, the activists of deep ecology consider themselves as anarchist, non-believers in hierarchy, non-bureaucratic, and decentralized. These perceptions held and the activities initiated by the exponents of deep-ecology, have given rise to the critiques of ecofeminism. Despite similarities between the two, they hold different positions in regard to these issues.

³⁰ Koenraads (n 27).

³¹ *ibid*

To start off, ecofeminists point out to the fact that a vast majority of the exponents of deep ecology are all men. They regard their language, unified program and usage of the logical style as opposed to the intuitive style often accorded to women to be revealing of the masculinist nature of the movement.

Having said this, ecofeminism is not unified and unanimous in its theorization and has within its ambit, plethora of diversity.³² Hence, uniformization of the ecofeminist analysis is a difficult task.

Now, for the purpose of understanding the ecofeminist critique of deep ecology, some basic tenets with which a bulk of ecofeminists tend to adhere to needs to be identified. Karen Warren, for example, believes that ecofeminism contains the following:

- ❖ a critique of the dominant ‘patriarchal conceptual framework’; and
- ❖ offers an alternative feminist framework that is ‘grounded in familiar ecological principles.’³³

Ecofeminist thinkers tend to agree on one point, i.e. that androcentrism— by which men took the domination of women as well as the nature— is the core problem. They believe that domination of women and nature are very much connected and hence, environmental activism is needed to emancipate both.³⁴ They also criticize the ‘Patriarchal Dualism’, through which the world is ordered by dividing into two opposite parts: mind vs body, reason vs intuition and culture vs nature, also, popularly known as the ‘Cartesian Dualism’. According to this world-view the dominated ‘other’ is always undervalued and discriminated against. It is also expanded and applied to the case of women, people of colour, minorities and so on, where one group of people seek domination and oppression on other groups. As per ecofeminism, the oppressed groups, in particular women and people of colour, are often associated with body, rather than the mind, thus, may be considered as intuitive, but overemotional. This dualism creates a hierarchy of values where reason is considered superior to intuition (a value more popularly associated with women according to the predominant gender role narrative) and a strange dichotomy is created between culture and nature, which, to thinkers like Ynestra King, is one of the main causes of subjugation of women.³⁵

One of the major points of the deep ecology-ecofeminism debate is how deep ecologists critique anthropocentrism. Another criticism of deep ecology stems from what the philosophers have meant by ‘self’, described in deep ecology’s

³² Sessions (n 25).

³³ *ibid*

³⁴ *ibid*

³⁵ *ibid*

basic principle of self-realization. It has been critically analysed by Val Plumwood in her work 'Nature, Self and Gender: Feminism, Environmental Philosophy, and the Critique of Rationalism'.³⁶ In accordance with ecofeminists, roots of anthropocentrism lies in several challenging value dualisms, such as 'culture vs. nature' dualism. They say that the criticism of anthropocentrism forwarded by deep ecologists, fails to see that patriarchal underpinnings of anthropocentric assumptions. In terms of the second problematic feature of deep ecology (self-realization), that contends human self is actualized only when it is merged with cosmos, they say that this theory of the expanded self is, in effect, nothing but a misguided form of human colonialism, that fails to treat nature as a genuine 'other', which is independent of human interest and purposes. Patriarchy, as a form of social organization and a form of dominance is the focus of the feminists.³⁷ This principle is false, Plumwood argues, because of 'the discontinuity of thesis', which is a clear ontological divide between human and nature, remains intact.³⁸

Deep Ecology and the Third World Critics

Deep ecology has been attacked by different thinkers and activists of various schools of thought like social ecology, liberal democracy and ecofeminism. Murray Bookchin, a social ecologist for instance, accused deep ecology and Earth First! (a vanguard activist) of being incoherent intellectually, ignorant of the socio-economic factors that contribute to environmental crises. He also criticized the founder to 'Earth First!' for recommending that mass starvation a solution to the crisis of human population and environmental deterioration.³⁹ One of the voices that had been less represented, hence, less heard of comes from outside the Western world.⁴⁰ Apart from the labels attributed to deep ecologists such as sexist, misanthropists, fascists and racists, the critics of third-world countries accused deep ecology of being 'elitists' – for they attempt to preserve wilderness only to be used by certain sections of economically and socio-politically well-off people. Further, these critics have accused deep ecology of mainstreaming western cultural imperialism which

³⁶ Christian Diehm, 'Arne Naess, Val Plumwood, and Deep Ecological Subjectivity: A Contribution to the 'Deep Ecology-Ecofeminism Debate'' (2002) 7(1) *Ethics and the Environment* 25 <www.jstor.org/stable/40339021> accessed 28 July 2019.

³⁷ Bradford (n 6).

³⁸ Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (Teresa Brenna ed, 2nd edn, Routledge 2003) 43.

³⁹ Paul Messersmith-Glavin, 'Between Social Ecology and Deep Ecology: Gary Synder's Ecological Philosophy' (1990) *The Anarchist Library*, <<https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/paul-messersmith-glavin-between-social-ecology-and-deep-ecology-gary-snyder-s-ecological-philos.pdf>> accessed 18 December 2018.

⁴⁰ David M. Johns, 'The Relevance of Deep Ecology to the Third World: Some Preliminary Comments', (1990) 12(3) *Environmental Ethics* 246 <<http://brontaylor.com/courses/pdf/Johns--DE2ThirdWorld.pdf>> accessed 18 December 2018.

aims to secure its own variety of conservation, which may not be suitable for countries outside the Western world. Ramachandra Guha, in his own words, offers a view of a 'sympathetic outsider' and his critique of deep ecology is historical and sociological, rather than philosophical in nature.⁴¹ His perception towards deep ecology is very much linked to issues raised by cultural relativists. He contends that deep ecology is uniquely American— a country which Guha regards to be similar to India in terms of ecological diversity, but significantly dissimilar in cultural and social history and its social and political goals are not quite the same as in countries like West Germany and India. Further, the consequences of putting deep ecology in practice worldwide could be very grave.⁴²

The focus of the deep ecologists on the wilderness area approach to prevent environmental degradation, Guha argues, is 'positively harmful' when applied to the Third World. Drawing the Indian example Guha points out that India has been home to a vast agrarian population who have, historically maintained, a fine balance in human relationship with nature. It has however been the influx of western ideas that tends to alienate these people from their homelands in order to protect wilderness, that have caused the direct transfer of resources from the poor to the rich.⁴³ He later on discusses that the focus on preservation of wilderness and restoration of degraded areas, excludes the other important issues associated with environmental issues. He criticizes the efforts of certain deep ecologists using Eastern traditions to found an authentic lineage for their philosophy. He regards the same as an exaggerated effort to keep the deep ecological theories universal. He concludes by regarding deep ecology as nothing but a radical trend within the wilderness preservation movement.⁴⁴

This criticism is of particular significance in light of the recent judgment of the Indian Supreme Court wherein the question of which sort of conservation—the western model of human exclusion, or the rather Indianized version, which Guha argues for— should be preferred in the Indian context, became a part of academic discourse came to the forefront once again.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Guha (n 5).

⁴² *ibid*

⁴³ *ibid*

⁴⁴ *ibid*

⁴⁵ Ishan Kukreti, 'Does the Supreme Court order mean eviction of forest dwellers right away?' *Down to Earth* (22 February 2019) <www.downtoearth.org.in/news/forests/does-the-supreme-court-mean-eviction-of-forest-dwellers-right-away--63315> accessed 30 July 2019.

Critical Analysis

Throughout the course of development of environmental ethics, deep ecology has been— and is still— playing a vital, contributing role in terms the way human beings should look at the environment. It gave rise to fundamental discussions and partially changed or modified the dominant anthropocentrism approaches deriving from western religious and philosophical thinking towards nature. However, from a moderate approach advocating for shifting anthropocentrism to eco-centrism and recognizing inherent value for nature to a far more radical movements advocating for substantial decrease in human population—, the journey of deep ecology was one the most influential, yet controversial one. Since its breakthrough in 1970s, it drew attention of the world and been applauded and criticized as an ontology of natural environment.

To better deal with environmental crises, it would be absolutely essential to understand not only the root causes of environmental degradation, but also dependency of a large population on natural resources. Deep ecology has precisely identified such philosophical causes, but its prescription for uprooting those challenges has failed to address the complexity of human societies. While, deep caring for nature, especially wilderness preservation is appreciated, deep understanding of such complexity is more appreciated. Since deep ecologists refer to human beings as an active organ of Mother Nature, caring for environment cannot and should not involve any advocacy for cutting one part to heal the problem of the whole body. Over 70% of population around the world, especially in Asia and Africa depend on national and international commons as their primary source of survival. Failure to deep understanding such intricacy, will result in more environmental deterioration because the indigenous people will not voluntarily cut out their relations and dependency on nature unless a better and sustainable alternative for survival is replaced. Protection of parks, wilderness areas and endangered for the sake of environment can only take place in countries where people have other alternatives of consumption, whereas in developing countries such advocacies are not practicable at least in the short-term. Deep ecology has also been charged as purely western ideology, but cannot be the mere base to invalidate it. Instead, to what extent such ideologies can be dangerous for both human being and the environment can be the heart of the problem. The consequences of implementing deep ecology theories into practice may result in amplifying environmental deterioration. People in developing countries are dealing with poverty and debt, wilderness areas provide their shelter, food, sanitation and basic minimum needs of their everyday live.

Furthermore, the world today is facing greater challenges which stem from inaccurate models and unjust behaviours and policies. The issues of overconsumption can be an illustration. Deep ecology can also criticised from this point of view that did not fully address unjust behaviours of small number

of countries which result in looting other countries. Overpopulation only can be an issue if everyone has access to the same level of natural resources and environmental deterioration. Whereas the developed countries reap the benefits of environmental degradation, the burdens are borne by developed countries. Deep ecology to a large extent was able to identify the challenges, the prescription is unbiased and lacks fairness and inclusivity. Lastly, since deep ecology tried to establish a new moral and philosophical ideology, the proposal for human population reduction is totally immoral. As exponents of deep ecology publicly expressed, they only care for environment and do not care about the immorality of such proposals. Therefore, it is very much needed for the complex world to reach a consensus to incorporate the tenets and provisions of every useful ideologies which result in both addressing the concerns of both humans as well as the environment.

The idea that the nature functions as a complex adaptive system, and elimination of one section of the population may end up harming the balance of nature has been something that the deep ecologists have failed to contemplate. Rather what is required is to reduce non-linear changes so that the natural balance may be maintained.

While the significance of deep ecology as movement in environmental ethics and its contribution to the later philosophical developments is absolutely undeniable, it has failed to answer the aforesaid criticisms with satisfaction.

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