

EDUCATION AND THE ATTITUDE OF RESPECT FOR NATURE

Maxwell Borjor Achuk Eba✉; Department of History and International Studies, University of Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria.

Abstract: This work addresses the question: How is respect for nature to be learned? In this aspect, we bring the perspective of virtue ethics. To be respectful towards nature is to develop a certain attitude within us. This attitude can be inculcated among human beings through relevant education. Proper education will build up a new awareness showing the need for being respectful towards nature. Environmental laws have been enacted by governments to help solve the environmental crisis. Yet it is true that the environment can be protected through these laws but it cannot be done fully. We conserve our environment out of fear of punishment. This is the main reason why our environmental laws fail. It is through moral awareness and action it can be done in a better way. Hence ultimately education can provide an important insight in our dealing with the environment. Hence education plays a major role in restoring environmental crisis. Man's attitude towards nature depends on the type of education he receives. This work argues that, through education, we can cultivate an attitude of respect towards nature. This will enable us to see in what way the attitude of respect for nature could be an instrument for the protection of nature. In this connection, we have taken help from O.P Dwivedi's idea of basic principles and environmental codes on the basis of which, as he argues that environment can be better preserved. He has also suggested certain guiding principles for environmental management. Hence with these principles, human beings can become good stewards of nature with the attitude of respect for nature.

Keywords; Education, Respect for nature, Environmental Ethics.

✉ raremaxxy@yahoo.com

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INTRODUCTION

According to Taylor (2017) all living being possesses inherent worth as a member of the earth. To adopt the attitude of respect for nature is to ascribe inherent worth to the living being. This attitude towards nature is based on Kant's categorical imperative. The adoption of this attitude involves cultivating the disposition to treat every person having inherent worth. Analogously in environmental ethics the attitude of respect towards nature involves having the disposition to treat nature which has an inherent worth by itself (Taylor 2017). But the problem is how do these dispositions are being cultivated? How the attitude brings the capacities that are needed to ascribe inherent worth to living beings? No one gets these capacities only by adopting this attitude. It cannot be acquired overnight through a sudden rational process.

Taylor calls for a change in action, emotion, perception, sensibility and understanding towards nature. Hence it demands for a complete change in the character of an individual, to see himself as sharing a common bond with nature. It does not come suddenly. This problem can be solved if we construct the attitude of respect for nature as a virtue ethics. But the same question again, arises that is, how virtues can be cultivated? The answer is, virtues can be cultivated or acquired through moral training from the beginning of a person's childhood and the training continues through the process of self improvement. Here comes the need of education in cultivating the attitude of respect. In a broader sense education here means, all that which man learns through various ways of communication. For human beings there are only few traits which are innate and they are limited. The

modern man that we see is the product of a long process of learning. Whatever the modern man is because of education rooted in his rich tradition, history, culture and knowledge (Tilbury 1995). On the other hand, there are many things which are innate in nature. It is innate for a plant to grow in a particular farm, and many different animals exist in many different forms which are innate in them according to the laws of nature. This innate nature is revealed through various manifestations of nature, such is, flower blooms, lion roars, river flows downwards etc. They do not need education to behave in that particular way. It is the human being who needs education to learn about each and every aspect of life. It is the human being whose actions can only be judged morally right or wrong. Through education only he shapes his character. Whatever he acquires in his early age through the process of integrated education that only shapes his character. From his childhood he gets a holistic knowledge.

Environmental education should be one aspect of this process. Man's attitudes towards nature and environment depend upon the education. Environmental education should have two objectives. The first one is, to promote environmentally sensitive behaviour which can be imparted through environmental ethics and the second one should be to provide knowledge about the causes and consequences of environmental pollution and degradation (Jensen & Schnack 1997). At the elementary school level a child should deal with nature in a positive way by developing interest and respect for other forms of life.

Environmental Ethics and Education

Inculcating environmental responsibilities are one of the objectives of environmental education (Neal & Palmer 2003). It provides knowledge and promotes awareness to inculcate attitudes, values, commitments and ethical responsibilities in children as well as in adults for proper utilization of natural resources. This also involves the protection and improvement of environment. Hence environmental education is very closely linked with environmental ethics. Environmental ethics is the code of behaviour for guiding and controlling human actions towards environment. This code of behaviour does not depend on the presence or absence of environmental laws for the understanding, protection and improvement of the environment (Abessa et al., 2019). On the other hand, the environmental policies are dependent on environmental ethics.

Environmental ethics encourages the development of environmental laws, attitudes and behaviour. Hence environmental ethics is a very important aspect of environmental planning and management. It is the eco-friendly attitude towards nature that controls the human behaviour and action which is very closely related to the environmental education. UNESCO has an environmental education section which has been implemented since 1975, and that is the UNESCO-UNEP International Environmental Programme (IEEP) (Jickling & Wals 2008). But the question is how to make people aware of environmental ethics? We know that all ecological problems cannot be solved by science and technology. This is the reason behind for the need for environmental ethics. Science gives us technologies to clean the environment but also need a change in our value system with regard to

nature and it can only be done through education.

WAYS TO EDUCATE AND INCULCATE THE ENVIRONMENTAL VALUES

Education has a very important role in creating environmental awareness which leads to action. We can see five ways to educate and inculcate the environmental values in people. These are (a) home, (b) religion, (c) mass media, (d) formal and informal education, and finally (e) making people to realize that “nature is our teacher”.

(a) Home

Environmental education must begin from home (Jickling & Wals 2008). The parents of a child should bear the responsibility of giving the environmental values and ethics to the child. The role of the mother is very important in this regard. Mother is the best and the first teacher and home is the best and first school of a child to learn. At this level the teaching is interdisciplinary and holistic. The mother does not divide her instructions into, physics, chemistry, biology etc. It is the whole environment that the child learns while acquiring his knowledge. For the child, nature is the whole one unit and not subdivided into different units. Therefore it is easy to teach the child about the holistic nature of earth and how the protection of this unity is necessary. When the parents see the child hits an animal or tears the branches of a plant then the parents say do not do this because you hurt the animal or plant. They tell the child to water the plant to take care of the pet animals because they need it and they are important units of nature. It is in this way parents can teach and explain the purpose of a living being to the child.

(b) Religion

It is another way of inculcating value in an individual's character. Every person is born in to some religion. All religions incorporate environmental values in their code of behavior (Dutcher et al., 2007). Therefore religious institutions are important in imparting environmental values. Particularly in Hindu religion people offer worship Gods and Goddesses associated with some animals and plants. In many festivals animals and plants are worshiped and this shows the value given to maintain a healthy balance between the human-beings and nature (Chauhan & Chauhan 2019). In Mahabharata, Sri Krishna tells not to worship the rain God Indra rather he suggests to worship the Gobardhan mountain, the river Yamuna, trees and forests because they are the important units of nature (Thaker 2011). Children can be taught the value of nature by such kinds of stories from mythology.

(c) Mass media

The third mechanism to inculcate environmental values and awareness is through mass media. Mass media has very important role in preparing and communicating meaningful messages for the public (Kirac et al., 2012). Now-a-days environment has become an important topic in spreading awareness of the importance of healthy environment. It spreads the message that man is an integral part of environment and he is dependent on it and should maintain, improve and protect the environment. It spreads the message by advertising and campaigns related to the protection of nature. Many eminent personalities including sports and film personalities spread the message of the importance of nature. It includes campaigns which spreads the message of the value of tiger and environment. This is an important mechanism to teach people regarding the value of nature.

(d) Formal and non-formal

education

Formal and non-formal educational systems have very important role in inculcating environmental ethics. It should inculcate positive environmental ethics and motivate the students to take desirable environmental actions. Research studies suggest that the attitudes and behaviours of children are modelled after the attitudes and behaviours of others. All students spent six to seven hours a day in a school. The children should understand the role of various biological, physical and socio-economic factors on which the natural environment is dependent. This interdependency should be taught in both formal and informal educational system. Environmental education should also promote the attitudes which encourage the individuals to discipline themselves in order to maintain a balance with the natural environment. They should be taught to make a distinction between the essential and the luxurious developmental programmes (Jickling & Wals 2008).

A holistic approach requires the contribution of all natural, social, ethical and art sciences for analyzing and finding solutions for environmental problems. The ethical dimension is an important aspect like all other aspects. Involving students in environmental campaigns, encouraging them to plant trees and to take care of those trees, teaching them the important role the trees play in the environment etc. are some of the activities through which the educational system impart certain values in children. Informal education like taking the students to nature camps is also important. There they can learn the important purpose each and every living and non-living entities have in our ecosystem. For example, we can imagine a dialogue between a teacher and a group of school children where a teacher is explaining the students the need for protecting environment.

Teacher - "The tiger is to nature

what parliament is to our democracy".
Question - "How is it so sir?"

Answer - "it is because, if you protect parliament, you protect everything it stands for: the constitution, freedom, and the people. Similarly if you protect the tiger, you protect its forests and its streams and the entire ecosystem that keeps us alive."

The above explanation is simplistic but it explains the logic of conservation to the children.

(e) Nature is our teacher

This is the traditional belief that views nature as a world of spirit. Physical phenomena are not just the material wants of life but it also influences our intellectual advancements. We learn many chains of connections from nature. All natural entities, laws and forces are interdependent. Nature itself is the vast repository of various kinds of knowledge. We learn many things from nature. Nature has sustainable solutions to the problems human being is facing today. Scientists and engineers study the unique models and systems of nature while designing new technologies. This kind of biologically-inspired engineering is called biomimicry.

American biologist Ianin M. Benyus in his book *Biomimicry: Innovation Inspired by nature*, was the first person to propose that we learn many things from nature and this is the perfect tool for eco-design (Benyus 1997). From the following example we can see how our day- to-day material things have been built upon nature's self-maintaining processes. One of the examples is, the leaf of the lotus plant has a waxy surface that is covered with tiny bumps or ridges. These ridges cause water droplets to roll off, carrying away dust and dirt. This unique ability of the lotus plant to clean itself is called lotus effect. This particular technique is used for self-cleaning paint coatings. Research is also underway to create self cleaning textiles, metals and

plastics. These are some of important means through which children can be educated about the environment and ethical responsibilities that they have towards protecting the environment. Environmental ethics can be taught only through education. The attitude of respect for nature is inculcated through environmental education. Respect as a virtue can be cultivated from the childhood.

Children should be motivated in such a way that they should see every entity in nature as having an important existence. Children are the future citizens of the country. They are the future leaders, in decision-making, in politics, in industry, in science and technology. If they are provided with right kind of environmental education which is based on environmental ethics then we can be sure about their future behaviour and the values that they will adopt towards environment. They are the ones who are going to deal with future environmental problems and therefore they should be trained from the ethical point of view in the preparation and implementation of environmental and developmental projects. For the present citizens and leaders' mass media, religion and many awareness programmes will help to be an environmental friendly citizen. Now- a - days people are aware about the well balanced nature. They know nature in itself has to be respected not for anything else but for its own sake, because science and technology can never solve all kinds of ecological problems. We need to bring change in our attitude towards nature from exploitative to the respectful attitude.

It is the duty of all responsible and concerned citizens to see that natural resources are wisely used. On the other hand each individual has a right to a healthy environment but at the same time no one has the privilege to endanger the environment to the extent of adverse effects of nature. Ecological sustainability of natural resources should be maintained. Therefore it is the duty of

human beings to be a good steward to see that natural balance is maintained along with the use of natural resources. This kind of management should be based on the attitude of respect.

According to O.P Dwivedi (1994), in order to make this happen we must have to show our commitments towards the respect for nature in our day-to-day moral life. This attitude is not possible without some set of norms which are formulated and accepted. Adopting such norms in a form of a code would be the first practical step towards cultivating the attitude of respect towards nature. We know that by acquiring such an attitude we are working towards the well-being of nature along with the well-being of our children and future generations. In this process education, non-governmental organizations, mass media, religion and culture have important roles. The question is how the attitude of respect for nature can be an instrument for environmental protection? Can there be a strategy that is based on the ethics of environmental conservation? The answer is yes, it can be. The first draft of the report on World Conservation Strategy for the 1990s states:

- (a) *People should respect nature, like all creatures. we are an integral part of nature as well as users and consumers of nature;*
- (b) *Every life form is unique and warrens respect regardless of its worth to people;*
- (c) *All persons should take responsibility for their impacts on nature;*
- (d) *People should ensure the means of survival of all other life forms; and should not knowingly cause the extinction of another species;*
- (e) *People should treat all creatures humanely, and protect them from cruelty and avoidable suffering. (IUCN, UNEP and WWF, Second*

World Conservation Strategy for the 1990's (first draft), Gland, Switzerland: IUCN, September 1989, pp. 3-4)

If we look at these principles then we can see that these principles are very much similar to those principles prescribed by Taylor's theory of respect for nature and deep ecology. Today human being is well aware and well informed about the need for protecting and the moral duty associated with it. Without appropriate action and efforts of preservation, environmental conservation will not be possible. For this reason a code of environmental protection and conservation on the basis of the attitude of respect for nature may be seen as an instrument for protecting nature. An environmental code of conduct can be adopted by each individual. A code is always general. But we can draw many guidelines from the code with which we can deal with specific situations, such as protection of endangered species, removal of rain forests, acid rains etc. This would tell us what is to be done and what action should be taken. These guidelines are similar to the government regulations for environmental protection and conservation.

The code is to provide inner incentives such as the attitude of respect for nature. Having such a code means an individual acts in such a way so that he not only thinks about his welfare but also he thinks about the well being of the natural environment. This kind of attitude is necessary because in democratic countries like India environmental laws and regulations cannot be forced. Therefore a code becomes an adoptive instrument that can be cultivated. It encourages our obligation towards nature by seeing it as the source of sustainer of all life support system.

DWIVEDI GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT.

O.P Dwivedi (2004) has formulated some codes on the basis of basic principles. The basic principles are:

(a) Stewardship based on the virtue of respect ought to be the human being's obligation so that the aim of all nations should become ecologically sound sustainable development.

(b) It is a fact that there is interdependency among all entities in nature (Dursun & Mankolli 2021). Disturbance in one part would lead to disturbance on all other parts and we should recognize that fact.

(c) We should accept that we are the generations which is accountable for present and future generations. The responsibility should be shared by the individuals, corporation and many other groups in the society (Udoudom 2021). We should also have the responsibility to make aware our fellow human being regarding the environmental protection and conservation. Therefore all individuals are accountable for the action that brings disastrous consequences for the environment. On the basis of these basic principles we formulate some environmental codes.

(a) Respect for nature as a whole including its constituent entities should be our attitude. It is the right of every entity to achieve the fulfilment of its complete life cycle.

(b) It is the duty of each society to act as the care taker of the environment along with his fellow human beings. It is the need for the society to encourage, restraint and caution in the use of natural resources. Attempts

should be made to control man's greed and also his exploitative attitudes by cultivating the attitude of respect for nature.

(c) It is the obligation of all present individuals to hold natural resources in trust for the present and future generations. It is the moral commitment of all individuals to protect and conserve the environment.

(d) It is the responsibility of each person to preserve and maintain ecological balance, biological diversity, endangered species and environmental sustainability.

(e) It is the right of every individual to participate in environmental decision-making process to receive information and to be consulted by governmental bodies.

(f) There should be flow of information by mass media to the public concerning the state of the environmental qualities, and possible dangers arising out of the industrial and developmental projects.

(g) We should create a group of environmental volunteers in each society to help in monitoring and maintaining a healthy and sustainable environment.

These environmental codes are like the instruments based on the attitude of respect for nature for environmental protection and conservation. It should be seen as voluntary action starting from the grass root level. This environmental code could be adopted by any country with suitable modifications. Different nations and different individuals have different perceptions about the environment. Therefore they have different needs to be satisfied from the environment. The code could be modified to address different environmental problems in different nations. On the basis of these

environmental codes. O.P Dwivedi has suggested certain guiding principles for environmental management. The environmental codes are voluntary instruments and it requires support from governmental bodies.

(a) Conservation and stewardship

The government should pursue a national policy that enhances environmental conservation and preservation. It should maintain the common properties such as the watersheds, soils, atmosphere and space etc. for the future generations as the obligation of present generations.

(b) Prevention and collective decision-making process

The Government should formulate the preventive environmental policies instead of remedial and curative policies. The protection of nature should be a collective concern. On the basis of this principle the Government should call for co-operation from the public for environmental planning, assessment and management.

(c) Global responsibility

We know that environmental problems are global in nature. Therefore the governments of different countries should work cooperatively to develop and apply solutions to those problems.

(d) Environmental ethics, education and awareness

This should be the most important guideline for environmental management. Proper awareness and education create the necessity for clean and safe environment. The government should provide environmental education which is based on environmental ethics. It gives us the knowledge about the nature of different environmental problems and at the same time it

demands for a change in our attitude from the exploitative to the respectful attitude towards nature. The moral guidance for environmental protection and conservation is in need. It should serve as a framework for environmental management to guide people. The moral code and the guiding principles for environmental management are needed because without one the proper environmental management would be ineffective. So in the words of O.P Dwivedi: "The true impact of a code if it were to be accepted would be hard to measure; but its absence so far is seen as a moral vacuum" (Dwivedi 1994, p. 118). He says amorality towards nature has given us self-destruction.

Amorality in terms of objectivity and materialism of nature has given us many environmental problems. He calls for a change in our attitude so that we become a steward of nature. It demands that we should be in harmony with nature with the help of the environmental code of conduct and guiding principles for environmental management. Then only we can build a harmonious relationship with nature. The reason behind bringing Dwivedi's concepts of environmental code and guiding principles in this context is to relate the attitude of respect for nature with the welfare of human beings.

The human being is the only creature in nature totally dependent on it for his survival in every aspect of life. He is the only creature who has one major characteristic that differentiates him from other creatures i.e., the rationality and morality. He is the only one for whom the moral domain is concerned. Traditionally this domain was only limited to human beings and fellow human beings. But now the time has demanded to extend this domain to the non-human nature including everything. Only human beings can value anything whatever he wants. He ascribes the instrumental value to

nature, if he can ascribe this value then he can also ascribe the intrinsic value and he can adopt the attitude of respect for nature. Therefore human beings have a duty to take care of nature in the same way he has a duty towards a baby and an insane person.

CONCLUSION

According to the traditional moral theory the moral domain does not include children and mad persons. But it does not give permission to normal rational individuals to behave immorally with them. It only said their behaviour cannot be judged morally because they are not rational. But at the same time morality demands the behaviour towards them should be moral because the normal rational human being's behaviour can be judged morally and they have certain responsibility towards a baby or insane person. Similarly we cannot demand moral behaviour from nature as it is irrational but our moral theory does prescribe us to take care of nature as we have duty to take care of it. It also demands to maintain a harmonious relationship with nature because it ultimately affects the welfare of human beings. To adopt and inculcate the attitude of respect for nature is possible because we already hold this attitude towards other fellow human beings including irrational human beings such as babies and insane persons. The cultivation of this attitude depends on both the formal and informal education. The respectful attitude gives us a better interrelationship with nature. It provides a strong self-interested reason for treating nature with respect. A self interested reason means the reasons based on a person's concern for his own virtue and development. In this context "respect" as an environmental virtue becomes a strong ground for environmental protection for human beings. It gives us many reasons to have a more positive, sustainable and respectful position towards nature. The out comes

of such attitude is obviously going to be correct. To be nature friendly is to be respectful towards it.

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