

'Land Ethics' and Tagore's Vision of Ecological Harmony in Modern Environmental Policy—Making for Improvement of Quality of Life

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ABSTRACT In the 1930's Aldo Leopold, one of the first scientists to raise the issue of 'Land ethic' became one of the founding stones for future ecological preservation. The philosophy of land ethic changes "the role of Homo sapiens from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it". With the help of such conscious effort and through ethical consideration we will be able to build a sense of mutual co-operation among the members of our biotic community. By creating a harmonious relationship among the fellow members of the biotic community it will help to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the land. Rabindranath Tagore's vision of harmonious relationships between man and nature recreated a unique place called Santiniketan. Tagore's philosophy of beauty in nature has inspired numerous academic institutions and influenced the lifestyle of common people throughout Bengal and rest of the country. Santiniketan is a place where nature is in perfect harmony with human beings. Creation of Santiniketan stands as a unique example where environmental philosophy is synthesized with the practical execution to create a perfect harmonious relationship between man and environment.

Thesis of this paper is to examine the recent failure of various ecological policies in light of Leopold and Tagore's work. The author proposes that the policy-makers are needed to be trained through environmental philosophy and environmental ethics in order to execute a plan successfully.

Limited mobility, less human migration and limited competition did not allow the exhaustion of natural resources in the environment during the early and medieval periods of human history. But since the beginning of the nineteenth century in Europe, a new era slowly emerged, exhibiting a glorification of technology and rapid industrial development. Science and technology gave birth to a new concept, the Baconian philosophy, one totally different from those prevailing in earlier periods. Mass locomotion, mass consumption and mass communication became the underlying preoccupations of the new generation as science and technology gave birth to the industrial revolution. The twentieth century is the century of masses: mass education, mass entertainment, mass transportation, stadia with 100,000 seats, universities with twenty or thirty thousand students and so on. The great force of technology happens to be affecting every part of

human life, including man's interaction with nature. Ecological destruction during earlier periods was much slower due to smaller populations, less migration and technological invasion when compared to the last two hundred years of our history.

Due to the development of mass transportation, human populations could migrate more easily and rapidly from one place to another. Dominance of city growth in terms of population and industrial development drew large numbers of people from smaller towns, causing unusual population concentration at certain metropolitan centers. Mass concentration around large cities had a strong impact on nature and every area of human life.

Today we are talking about the environment and its resources which in recent years is threatened by the escalating process of urbanization, industrialization, land developments and the con-

centration of population in metropolitan areas. A new concept of open space and land use is needed. The conservation of natural resources and ecological process, clean water and air, scenic values, and the preservation, of historical values have become valuable properties for our future generation's quality of life.

Leading to evolve a new concept of ecological consciousness it should be strongly based on Aldo Leopold's 'land ethics' theory. Management and use of land resources need to build an attitude of cooperation among various components on land. The attitude of land as a community instead of commodity should become the inner spirit of man and nature relationship. A relationship of love and respect toward nature needs to be build from the beginning. The interdependence of various components on land within a framework of cooperation and a limitation on freedom of action in the struggle for existence is the foundation of land ethics. In practise, the land-relation is still strictly economic, entailing privileges but not obligations.

Aldo Leopold writes in his book entitled *A Sand County Almanac*,

All ethics so far evolved rest upon a single premise: that the individual is a member of a community of interdependent parts. His instincts prompt him to compete for his place in the community, but his ethics prompt him also to cooperate (perhaps in order that there may be a place to compete for).

The land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land (p.239).

Thus, I think the management and policy maker need to build an attitude of cooperation toward various components on land. The management of land resource can become successful in term of land ethic only when every individual from the sponsoring agency is enlightened by the basic philosophy of mutual cooperation. The change and introduction of law in land can be accomplished by creating a healthy

attitude and atmosphere within the body of policy makers. The change should come through our intellectual emphasis, loyalties, affections, and convictions. A policy achieves its goal through a two way traffic. No policy can produce a fruitful result by imposing it on a community. A policy should be evolved on the basis of preliminary understanding of this situation and sentiment of the community. No community will be ready to accept any imposition of law even if it is for the benefit of the society. Thus the basic need of mutual understanding between the policy-maker and the community becomes one of the most important factors. Through affectionate, loving and cooperative attitude toward the land (which includes various components of land including human beings), policy maker can successfully execute the plan. "A land ethic changes the role of Homo sapiens from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it. It implies respect for his fellow-members, and also respect for the community" (p. 240). The above statement of Leopold clearly indicates the basic philosophy of land-ethic. In my view, until the policy makers and funding agencies have rightfully developed an attitude of cooperation no policy can be successfully executed.

The beauty of existence of all living beings depends on environment. And the environment of ecological harmony can survive only through proper planning, development and management of environment on the basis of land ethic. Therefore, the common people can be made to understand the need of environmental conservation through a sincere, sympathetic and cooperative attitude.

Quality of life is not a separate entity which can be achieved without considering various factors of planning in biotic community. A harmonious relationship between human beings and environment will be the fountain of our quality of life. As a member of the biotic community we share a tremendous responsibility to maintain the harmonious relationship between various elements. "Land as a community....that land is to be loved and respected", if we understand the inner philosophy of the above statement, it is through

proper planning and management of land ethic we will be able to maintain the harmony and beauty of our environment. Scientific and technological advancement to maintain the ecological balance for a better environment can not create enough impact until the basic philosophy is understood. Scientists and technologists with a sound knowledge of environmental ethics can only preserve the serenity of this beautiful earth.

In this regard, during the early part of this century (1910's) Rabindranath Tagore's vision of ecological harmony between Homo sapiens and nature, through his educational planning, created a new horizon in environmental education. His philosophy of humanity and application in creating an ideal educational environment in nature is not yet realized throughout the world. The quality of life in Santiniketan is a concrete example of his unique philosophy between nature and mankind. In the philosophy of education professed by Tagore has incorporated the idea that the role of nature is as much essential to the possibility of education proper as any other aspect. This necessity is not just of knowing scientifically the world of observation, but of bringing about the fullest and comprehensive development of the personality of the student. The wide open sky and the pure air, the trees and their fresh green leaves all have a unique impact upon the child's mind in facilitating it towards the cultivation and acquisition of knowledge. Tagore's basic philosophy of environment is based on the spirit of land ethics and Indian traditional *Ashram* environment. Tagore's environmental philosophy is functional through regular educational programme. Environmental philosophy and environmental technology cannot become successful in long run unless both are synthesized and put in practice through regular educational system.

As the child grows older and partakes of the crowded world of various interests and activities, his/her mind would naturally depart from its earlier, original association with the world of nature. That is why Tagore suggests that the young child should be provided with the best

opportunity to be heartily acquainted with the manifold of nature, and to drink in its unparalleled beauty. It is when the children are young and energetic, when their heart is pristine, their senses most susceptible of external impression, and they are fully curious of the world around them, that they ought to be given ample opportunities to play in the midst of nature and to remain blissfully attached to nature. As Tagore says:

It was the intention of God to educate the mind of the child through the magnanimous influence of nature. But in betraying this divine intention we are betraying our own potentialities.

The openness of the sky and purity of air are miraculously efficacious in making the mind open to new ideas, in freeing the mind from narrow dogmatism and in endowing the mental faculty with clarity of understanding.

This thesis of this paper proposes to establish the role of environmental philosophy and land ethics in achieving the quality of life in the following steps:

- (i) building a work-culture among sponsoring agencies on the basis of land ethics philosophy.
- (ii) community level activities (which will be sponsored by private and government agencies).
- (iii) School and college teachers' training on the basis of environmental philosophy and ethics.
- (iv) understanding and planning through various levels of educational programme.

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