

Systematic Review on Environmental Ethics with Special Reference to Hinduism and Buddhism

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ABSTRACT

Environmental ethics has emerged as a significant interdisciplinary field that examines the moral relationship between human beings and the natural environment. Hinduism and Buddhism, two of the world's oldest religious traditions, offer profound philosophical perspectives that promote ecological harmony, compassion, and sustainable living. This systematic review synthesizes existing scholarly literature on environmental ethics with special reference to Hinduism and Buddhism by examining peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and authentic academic sources. The review identifies key themes, including the sacredness of nature, non-violence (Ahimsa), interdependence of all living beings, compassion (Karuna), non-attachment, and the principle of Dharma in environmental stewardship. The findings reveal that both traditions advocate a holistic worldview in which humans are regarded as integral components of the natural ecosystem rather than its dominators. These ethical principles provide valuable guidance for addressing contemporary environmental challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution, and unsustainable resource exploitation. The review explored that integrating the environmental ethics of Hinduism and Buddhism into modern environmental policies, education, and conservation practices can contribute to sustainable development and foster greater ecological responsibility at individual and societal levels. In this article, systematic review on environmental ethics with special reference to Hinduism and Buddhism was discussed.

Keywords: *Environmental Ethics, Hinduism, Buddhism.*

INTRODUCTION

Environmental ethics is a branch of philosophy that examines the moral relationship between human beings and the natural environment. It explores ethical principles governing the use, conservation, and protection of natural resources while emphasizing the intrinsic value of ecosystems, biodiversity, and non-human life. With the rapid growth of industrialization, urbanization, climate change, deforestation, pollution, and the depletion of natural resources, environmental ethics has emerged as

an essential field of inquiry for promoting sustainable development and ecological balance. Religious and philosophical traditions have significantly influenced human attitudes toward nature and environmental responsibility. Among the world's oldest philosophical systems, Hinduism and Buddhism provide profound ethical frameworks that advocate harmony between humans and the natural world. These traditions emphasize compassion, non-violence, interdependence, and respect for all forms of life, offering valuable perspectives for addressing contemporary environmental challenges. In Hinduism, nature is regarded as sacred and is closely associated with divine manifestations. The Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, and Puranas contain numerous references that promote ecological harmony and responsible stewardship of the environment. The concept of Dharma encourages individuals to fulfil their moral duties toward society and nature, while Ahimsa (non-violence) discourages harm to living beings. Elements such as rivers, mountains, forests, animals, and celestial bodies are revered as sacred, reflecting an ecological worldview that recognizes the interconnectedness of all existence. Similarly, Buddhism offers a comprehensive ethical approach to environmental conservation through its teachings on compassion (Karuṇā), loving-kindness (Mettā), non-harming (Ahimsa), and dependent origination (Pratītyasamutpāda). Buddhist philosophy emphasizes that all living beings are interconnected and that human well-being depends upon maintaining ecological balance. The principles of moderation, mindfulness, and the avoidance of excessive consumption encourage sustainable lifestyles and responsible resource utilization. These teachings foster environmental awareness by promoting respect for life and minimizing suffering for all sentient beings. In recent decades, scholars have increasingly examined the relevance of Hindu and Buddhist environmental ethics in responding to global ecological crises. Their ethical principles align closely with contemporary concepts such as sustainability, biodiversity conservation, climate justice, ecological responsibility, and environmental stewardship. However, the existing literature remains dispersed across theological, philosophical, environmental, and interdisciplinary studies, creating the need for a systematic synthesis of available evidence. This systematic review aims to critically examine and synthesize the existing literature on environmental ethics with special reference to Hinduism and Buddhism. It seeks to identify the major ethical principles, philosophical foundations, common themes, and practical implications of these traditions for environmental conservation and sustainable development. By integrating findings from diverse scholarly sources, the review contributes to a deeper understanding of how ancient religious philosophies can inform contemporary environmental policies, ecological education, and global sustainability initiatives. The study also highlights research gaps and proposes directions for future interdisciplinary research on religion, ethics, and environmental conservation. The objective of the study is to explore the systematic review on environmental ethics with special reference to Hinduism and Buddhism.

SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Taina, L. & Dowarah, K. (2024). The research examines the influence of Buddhist ecological ethics on the preservation of indigenous cultures in Assam. The primary conceptual category of Buddhist ethics shapes the perspective towards nature and the environment. Buddhism emphasizes the significance of kindness, skilled means, non-violence, compassion, meditative awareness, and

environmental responsibility towards all living beings. Buddhist philosophy offers profound insights and ethical guidance concerning human-environment interactions. Buddhist ecological ethics encompasses both individual virtue ethics and constructivist social ethics. The objective of the study is to examine the influence of Buddhist ecological ethics on the preservation of indigenous cultures in Assam. The influence of religious philosophies on the preservation of the culture and traditions of indigenous communities. The study incorporates both primary observations and secondary sources to achieve the objectives of the theme.

Torres, J. (2024). It encompasses all aspects of the intricate relationship between contemporary environmental ethics, a philosophical discipline, and traditional philosophy. Although it mostly addresses Western philosophy, it also briefly yet significantly discusses the influence of Eastern thought on environmental ethics. The conversation is separated into three primary sections, with the initial section functioning as the introduction. In the section "Reception: Ancient Philosophy in Environmental Ethics," I examine the preliminary integration of ancient philosophical concepts into contemporary environmental ethics. Subsequently, in the section titled "Reaction: Environmental Ethics in Ancient Philosophy Scholarship," I examine the response of AP scholarship to this preliminary reception. In the concluding section of my work, I offer several pertinent recommendations for future research.

Kalmamatova, Z. et al. (2024). In exploring environmental philosophy, we seek to devise a sustainable world that safeguards the well-being of future generations and the planet. We adhere to ethical and moral inquiries, seeking a harmonious equilibrium between human advancement and the preservation of our planet's natural resources. Through meticulous research and introspection, we seek to deepen our comprehension of our relationship with the environment and our ethical obligations to it, ultimately striving to promote sustainability.

Capper, D. (2024). Buddhist ethics appears well-prepared for the era of climate change from a philosophical perspective. Buddhists are instructed to exhibit compassion and refrain from causing harm in a universe where all entities are interconnected throughout time and space. These beneficial enhancements reinforce the practice and encompass the commendable humane treatment of non-human animals. However, with closer examination of real-life occurrences, one might discern significant shortcomings in Buddhist environmental ethics. The practice does not afford all animals the respect and care they need, thus undermining the historical stability of vegetarianism, contrary to common perception. Moreover, Buddhists contend that entities must possess "perceived sentience" to hold significant moral worth. This suggests that we frequently neglect the ecological significance of flora, rocks, and aquatic bodies. Addressing climate change necessitates a moral consciousness toward entities such as flora, minerals, and aquatic bodies, hence requiring a definitive ethical framework. Buddhist environmental ethics, conversely, have few resources for formulating ethical frameworks concerning entities that Buddhism perceives as devoid of sentience; nevertheless, this may be evolving.

Sari, I. (2024). Environmental ethics is a crucial concern regarding sustainability and environmental conservation. This study is to examine the environmental ethics and significance of sustainability from the perspectives of Islamic, Christian, Hindu, Buddhist, and Confucian religions. This research

methodology employs a literature review and an analysis of sacred texts and religious doctrines from a religious standpoint. This research indicates that while each religion possesses distinct perspectives, they collectively underscore the crucial principle of environmental stewardship as a moral obligation of religious groups. The notion of stewardship underscores humanity's position as custodians and guardians of the universe. Environmental ethics within this theological framework emphasizes the need for safeguarding and nurturing the natural environment. This perspective can serve as a foundation for individuals and communities to cultivate understanding and accountability for environmental sustainability. Comprehending and applying religiously grounded environmental ethics is crucial for addressing the ecological difficulties confronting humanity in this century.

Gopal, N.R. (2024). Human activities adversely affect the ecosystem, exhaust resources, and diminish biodiversity, resulting in species extinction, deforestation, and climate change. This unsustainable development is inherently self-destructive. The Hindu worldview of the cosmos is characterized as 'organic' and 'holistic,' advocating a repudiation of materialism and positing that the aim of existence is liberation from desires and attachments. Consumption in Hindu culture was regulated through Samskaras, while mental discipline was achieved via Sadhana and Yoga; nature was conserved through Tyaga and a disciplined lifestyle. The concept of mutual sustenance and sharing is also referenced in the Bhagavad Gita. Similarly, Native Americans have a collectivist inclination to view the world in an integrated and holistic fashion, prioritizing communal well-being over individual welfare. They perceive themselves as interconnected with nature, and their viewpoint encapsulates the principle of sustainability, characterized by respect for all living forms, balance, proportionality, and holistic reflection. Ancient Indian and Native American civilizations exemplified wealth, as their technology across various domains was optimal, environmentally sustainable, decentralized, simplistic, and non-exploitative. They were technologies characterized by a humanistic interface. Nevertheless, over time, distortions infiltrated this traditional lifestyle. The deluge of materialism and consumerism has infiltrated and caused individual, societal, and environmental issues. This research demonstrates significant similarities between the worldviews and subsequently prompts an exploration of their connections. Ancient traditions possess the power and capability to propose answers and rectify issues, including the prevention of global environmental disasters.

O'Brolcháin, F. (2023). The possibilities are not devoid. The moral framework of our existence invariably constrains our engagement with possibilities—encompassing both the options we esteem and those we disregard. Philosophy has consistently revolved around concepts of morality, including the principles of living and the determination of values. As inequality escalates, new technologies evolve swiftly and may inflict damage, while many environmental problems emerge; it becomes apparent that conventional political and ethical frameworks are inadequate, especially concerning new technology and environmental issues. The domains of possibility studies and environmental ethics might engage in a productive dialogue regarding the development of novel moral frameworks to address the myriad challenges facing the planet.

Ahmed, L. (2023). The essay "Environmental Ethics and Cultural Values Related to the Philosophical Approaches to Eco-Axiology" examines the intricate interrelations among ethical concerns regarding the environment, cultural perspectives, and human values. This study examines eco-axiology, the philosophical exploration of values concerning nature. It examines the influence of moral principles on human interactions with nature. The study employed SPSS software for measurements, yielding data that included summary statistics and one-way ANOVA test analysis, which also elucidated the paired sample analysis between the variables. We analyze the differentiation between egocentrism and anthropocentrism, highlighting the spectrum of moral viewpoints and the impact of cultural standards on environmental ethics. We illustrate how environmental ethics can contribute to resolving critical environmental challenges, including climate change and biodiversity loss. We examine the ramifications of these ethical considerations for politics, education, business operations, and individual conduct. The research identified a robust and affirmative correlation between cultural values and environmental ethics. This dialogue serves as a call to action, urging individuals to become good stewards of the Earth and coexist harmoniously with nature for the benefit of current and future generations.

Pradheksa, P.Y. et al. (2023). This article seeks to analyze the perspectives of Hindu and Buddhist spiritualism concerning initiatives to address environmental degradation in Indonesia and to identify commonalities between Hindu and Buddhist spiritualism and the principles of Sufism in Islam regarding environmental conservation. This paper employs a library research methodology utilizing a descriptive-qualitative technique. The research indicates that the ecological degradation in Indonesia is highly concerning. This occurs because of humanity's disregard for the environment, prioritizing profit maximization above all else. Religion exerts influence in environmental conservation by imparting ethical principles and moral values in individuals. Spirituality in Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam seeks to attain proximity to God. Each religion possesses a distinct notion for enhancing spirituality: bhakti marga yoga in Hinduism, Hasta Ariya Magha in Buddhism, and Sufism in Islamic teachings. The principles espoused by each of these religions collectively influence one's spirituality, which can manifest in moral conduct. Immoral issues, such as environmental degradation, can be addressed by enhancing one's spirituality.

Karmakar, A. & Pal, V.K. (2023). Sanskrit literature is rich in grammatical complexity and passionate expression, as well as in its observations on environmental destruction and the necessity for conservation. These themes typically emerge in various contexts whenever this literature is examined. This study examines the significance of the environment in Sanskrit literature. Human life and the environment have coexisted throughout the duration of human evolution on Earth. The environment has furnished humanity with pristine air, uncontaminated water, and habitats devoid of pollutants. Historically, every religion globally has continuously emphasized the importance of the environment. Individuals in society must understand the importance of preserving the integrity of these components. He ought to recognize the benefits of ingesting fresh water, air, and nourishment. To sustain optimal health, individuals must ingest nutritious food, drink clean water, and inhabit a pollution-free environment.

Berebon, C.B. & Gwatana, J.G. (2022). Environmental philosophy examines the natural world and humanity's role within it. The paramount inquiries pertain to individuals' relationships with natural issues such as climate change and environmental deterioration. Numerous humanities departments have compiled catalogues of environmental disciplines, encompassing environmental ethics and philosophy, environmental disease, environmental microbiology, geography, environmental management, economics, among others. The complex character of the environmental issue compels us to examine the significance and depth of these human investigations. The problem is that human actions, along with our apathy towards the environmental damage they inflict, are leading to the loss of our most habitable planet. The philosophy of the environment examines nature beyond the inquiries of what the natural world "ought" to be or "is." We will employ an expository analytical approach to elucidate environmental concepts and difficulties. This will assist us in formulating actions and regulations to adhere to during environmental tests. This paper seeks to contest current environmental initiatives and provide ways to protect all individuals from the dilemma of anthropocentrism. This will enhance awareness of anthropogenic environmental degradation. Nonhuman beings ought to possess moral obligations and exhibit accountability in their interactions. This essay is significant as it proposes solutions to address the challenges of environmental degradation and conservation. Environmental degradation affects both individuals and the ecosystem.

Singh, R.P.B. (2021). Dharma is essential for Hindus in comprehending and cultivating harmony between humanity and nature, facilitating a paradigm shift termed "transcending the universe." This paradigm is vital for advancing global humanism in the 21st century, where environmental ethics and sustainability are pivotal for fostering a more peaceful and compassionate future. Arne Naess attributes the origin of the phrase "deep ecology" to Gandhi, a philosophy that acknowledges individuals as essential elements of their ecosystem. By reinterpreting Vedantic philosophy, Gandhi's work primarily facilitates the reawakening of the human spirit towards self-realization, culminating in insights that promote harmonious coexistence with nature. Gandhi's principles correspond with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), advocating for robust, viable, and sustainable coexistence in harmony with nature. This article discusses eco-spirituality within its historical framework and its significance for a sustainable perspective, along with Gandhi's philosophy and lifestyle.

Hourdequin, M. (2021). Environmental ethics is a field of inquiry that emerged from philosophers' critiques of anthropocentrism. Philosophers such as Richard Sylvan and Holmes Rolston III contended that conventional Western philosophy overlooked significant aspects of human relationships with animals and the broader environment. Reflect on the nascent phase of academic environmental ethics as a reaction to an identified deficiency in the Western tradition. This is due to the fact that numerous other traditions emphasize these relationships more significantly. The field has expanded and diversified in recent decades, leading to the emergence of a more pluralistic, cross-disciplinary, multinational, and intersectional environmental ethics. This article discusses the evolution of environmental ethics during the past fifty years. The discussion begins with the significance of nature, deep ecology, land ethic, environmental virtue ethics, and environmental pragmatism. Subsequently, I will discuss methods to integrate social and environmental challenges by examining them through power dynamics and confronting oppressive and dominant relationships.

This raise concerns on environmental and ecological justice. The final portion addresses the distinctive challenges of the Anthropocene. The characteristics and designation of this epoch continue to be a subject of contention.

Farbák, M. (2020). Environmental ethics is a discipline within ethics that examines increasingly significant global issues. As climate change accelerates and environmental hazards increase, it is essential to remain informed about current developments. Solutions in environmental ethics rely on research from various disciplines, including natural sciences, philosophy, social sciences, political studies, and religious studies. They could be pivotal in salvaging the planet. Robin Attfield, a retired professor of philosophy at Cardiff University, contemplated environmental ethics in this manner. The book was published as part of the Oxford University Press series. The book offers a succinct summary that renders the subject readily understandable for anybody pursuing additional knowledge. We requested Robin Attfield, a globally recognized authority on the subject, to author this book. He has authored or edited 15 books and over 250 articles and chapters. These texts encompass philosophical domains like ethics, philosophy of religion, history of philosophy, and environmental philosophy. *Environmental Ethics: A Very Short Introduction* does not provide much material on climate change; however, it elucidates the topic in a manner that is accessible and comprehensible for all audiences.

Khan, K.A. & Aigerim, D. (2020). India has always been characterized by extensive religious and cultural diversity. Hinduism is considered one of the principal faiths globally. Scholars assert that its rituals and origins trace back 4000 years in ancient Indian history. Buddhism evolved in the Aryan-dominated Indo-Gangetic Plain approximately 2,600 years ago and subsequently disseminated throughout South and Southeast Asia. This study examines the doctrines, traditions, and philosophies of these two ancient religions via extensive research and scholarly writing on the topic. A comprehensive analysis has been conducted to critically emphasize the principal parallels, differences, trends, societal acceptance, philosophical perspectives, worldwide influence, and community attitudes towards these two religions. Additionally, the theological, spiritual, and cultural perspectives of these two religions on numerous contingent matters, as well as the fall of Buddhism in India, have been examined. This study aims to develop a thorough and constructive understanding of Hinduism and Buddhism in India through an extensive reconsideration of the subcontinent's spiritual, cultural, and creative past.

Intongpan, P. (2019). Changes in the climate are primarily induced by natural phenomena and human activities. This study analyses three concepts of environmental ethics: anthropocentrism, ecocentrism, and Buddhist philosophy. The anthropocentric perspective asserts that humans own the right to own and govern all natural resources. This is a significant contributing cause to climate change, and the sole viable answer is to employ technology, legislation, and ethics at both national and international levels. Nonetheless, the issues persist unaddressed. The ecocentric perspective posits the interdependence of humanity and all living organisms within a life network. Ecological awareness, encompassing concepts such as deep ecology and land ethics, constitutes the initial step toward addressing issues. Buddhism posits that defilements, rather than intelligence, are the fundamental source of human issues. To resolve issues, individuals should adhere to the Middle Path

or the Noble Eightfold Path, which advocates for moderation in consumption to fulfill four fundamental needs, among other principles. An integrated approach synthesises the most effective elements of each concept to ensure their collaborative functionality. It integrates technology, legal frameworks, and international ethics grounded in both anthropocentric and ecocentric perspectives, asserting the intrinsic value of all entities, alongside practices derived from Buddhist philosophy, such as intelligence and meditation, to promote collaboration and mitigate greenhouse gas emissions.

Khan, T.R. & Gupta, V.L. (2018). Environmental ethics is a discipline that examines the philosophical aspects of environmental protection and its significance for human existence, ecological systems, and scientific advancement. This essay examines the advantages and disadvantages of environmental protection and its detrimental effects. This essay discusses the concept of "environmental consciousness," which is crucial for the stewardship of both humanity and the planet. This essay primarily inquires, "Why do we examine environmental ethics to safeguard our existence?" What is the necessity for environmental awareness? What measures should we use to safeguard life? What is the relationship between humans and the environment? What is environmental disturbance? Do modernism and science contribute to environmental protection or detriment? The literature on environmental ethics offers solutions and elucidation for these inquiries. This essay discusses the future of environmental ethics and its potential to enhance our quality of life. This essay examines the philosophers and philosophies that have shaped the evolution of environmental ethics from antiquity to the contemporary era. A comprehension of environmental ethics can guide our actions and determine the appropriate measures to safeguard the planet.

Framarin, C.G. (2012). The literature concerning Hinduism and the environment is wide and quickly growing. Academics from diverse disciplines, including Asian studies, history, anthropology, and political science, have made substantial contributions to this domain. Nonetheless, a considerable segment of this book is devoid of explicit explanations of essential terminology or delineation of foundational assumptions. This ambiguity frequently hinders philosophical engagement with the work. This paper's initial section elucidates a significant, implicit conviction held by numerous authors in this domain: that a coherent environmental ethic must ascribe direct moral standing to sentient, nonhuman entities in nature, such as plants and animals. In the subsequent section, I provide a concise rationale for this assumption. In the third section, I address the arguments and conclude that the case is, at least preliminarily, robust.

CONCLUSION

The systematic review highlights that both Hinduism and Buddhism offer profound ethical frameworks that promote environmental conservation and sustainable living. Hinduism views nature as sacred, emphasizing the interconnectedness of all living beings and encouraging reverence for rivers, forests, mountains, animals, and the Earth as manifestations of the divine. Similarly, Buddhism advocates compassion, non-violence (ahimsa), mindfulness, and interdependence, teaching that human well-being is inseparable from the well-being of the natural world. Both traditions discourage excessive consumption, greed, and exploitation of natural resources, instead promoting moderation, simplicity, and ecological responsibility. The review demonstrates that these religious philosophies remain highly relevant in addressing contemporary environmental challenges

such as climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution, and resource depletion. Their ethical principles can complement modern environmental policies by fostering values of stewardship, sustainability, and respect for all forms of life. Furthermore, integrating the environmental teachings of Hinduism and Buddhism into education, public awareness programmes, and community-based conservation initiatives can strengthen ecological consciousness and encourage environmentally responsible behaviour. The study concluded that Hinduism and Buddhism provide enduring moral and philosophical foundations for environmental ethics. Their emphasis on harmony between humanity and nature offers valuable insights for achieving sustainable development and ecological balance. Future research may explore the practical application of these ethical principles in environmental governance, education, and policymaking across diverse cultural and social contexts.

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