INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER
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OVERVIEW OF THE THESIS

Introduction and importance

The Greek word ‘philosophy’ was coined by Pythagoras. It implies ‘love of wisdom’. Is it enough to have only knowledge or acceptable belief and does that quantify as to having wisdom? It is prudent for man to know what exactly one means by ‘wisdom’. Wisdom is having a keen insight or acumen of life’s principles which are employed in one’s life. Philosophy can also be seen as one’s own personal set of values and view of the world that guides one in decision-making process. Thus, a philosophical bent of mind is necessary at this crucial moment when the very existence of human being is at peril.

Environmental philosophy is a branch under philosophy oriented towards environment. It concerns itself with environment and man’s place in the environment. It is, therefore, an exploration of man’s beliefs and knowledge regarding environment. Environmental philosophy requires man to acknowledge the wisdom that is needed to understand that he is an agent capable of transforming environment beyond its sustainable capacity. The transformation is happening through his excessive actions. Environment philosophy is an emerging field that helps in exploration and rediscovery of values and practices. These practices not
only help in realising an ecological support system for living a positive way of life but also in focusing on maintaining balance in Nature.

At this juncture, what is most important is self realization with action. Man’s obsession with living has made him take for granted the availability of natural resources. This has given a false ego boosting to his self-worth and he has lost his ‘connectedness with Nature’. This research is relevant today as the whole world is amidst catastrophic environmental problems. Man looks towards his belief systems for not only understanding the problem but also as a guiding factor to take corrective action. Indian belief systems largely stems from Indian Philosophy.

Human beings are not only connected to one another but are also an extension of Nature and all its living forces. This research is an intersection of two broad fields namely Environment and Indian philosophy. It focuses on the ways in which people and environments interact, and particularly on the environmental impacts of human activities. The emphasis is on understanding the ways in which the environment works and how philosophical interpretations of those basic principles help man to use the environment and its resources wisely.

An examination of environmental philosophy is undertaken to reveal the influence of Indian philosophical thought on current ecological attitudes. Indian philosopher outlines theories that have a profound impact on everyday life. What
he believes he lives up to and, therefore Indian philosophy has been during these thousands of years of existence, truly practical. Indian philosophy asserts that human being is limited in his ability to understand the universe in its entirety. The universe is in fact a whole entity, where every element is co-dependent on every other element but man views it as made up of segregated classified parts. The human attitude toward the natural world should be governed by the understanding that humankind and Nature is essentially the same thing.

Problem and Objective

Human impacts have lead to large scale dilapidation of the environment which has aroused environmental concern globally in recent years. The disparity between rich and poor along with man’s greed to achieve a comfortable life has endangered the environment to a great extent. The over utilisation of the natural resources has created an imbalance in Nature leading to global warming and climate change. Further, man’s actions have resulted in the extinction and endangerment of species. And, this loss has caused the destruction of various ecosystems disrupting Nature’s energy cycle to replenish itself.

Environmental hazards correspond directly to human health and quality of life throughout the world. The ozone depletion, acid rain, dumping of toxic wastes, deforestation and loss of bio diversities are just few highlights of the development
model sweeping across the globe. Whether environmental hazard exists in one's neighbourhood or not, it is indispensable for us to be informed of the issues as they affect one and all. Choices one makes every day degrade or upgrade the environment.

The aim of this thesis is to philosophically analyse man’s disconnectedness with Nature and thus instil in every human being the need for continued education, awareness and involvement of being in harmony with Nature. It is to show that philosophy is the base with which all these can be linked and interlinked. Philosophical wisdom tuning to ecological happenings has to be a part and parcel of every human action.

Philosophy is the link between man and environment and without philosophy man cannot be satisfied with his living. Man living in a village, or dwelling in a forest or earning in a city are no different. He might have different environmental situations but he is human being foremost and looks at Indian philosophy to find answer to the conflict he has with his environmental situations. The objective of this study is to show that man's connection with Nature is inborn and awareness of the environment awakens this feeling within him. It is a process and the awakening takes place at varied levels to different people at separate stages of their lives.
The objectives of this study, in short are:

1) To explore the treasure troves of information hidden in ‘ancient scriptures’ about Nature and man’s connection with his environment.

2) To formulate the teachings and principles chronicled in various Indian Philosophical systems about Nature.

3) To find out the concepts and views analyzed by various contemporary Indian philosophers about environment and Nature and man’s ability to imbibe the same.

4) To understand the deeper nuances of ancient practices and concepts having an environmental significance.

5) To register the gravity and seriousness of the environment degradation and its various impacts.

6) To highlight the need for continued ethical education, awareness and involvement of man in harmonious co-existence with other living beings in Nature.

**Hypothesis and Delimitations**

Learning environmentally relevant information should be done in such a way, so as to retain that information. It is imperative that the present generation would derive its practical and economic prosperity from the Nature but at the same time, an individual must learn to discriminate between his needs and his wants.
One must not forget that future generations too have an equal right to derive at least similar benefits from the environment. Human being’s awareness of his connection with Nature and his willingness to recognise this fact will help him change his behaviour, attitude and action towards Nature. Nature includes not only him but all other living and non-living things in this world.

The conflict between survival of other living beings and human being’s hunger for natural resources goads man do the balancing act of conserving Nature. Here, my thesis is an attempt in understanding and appreciating the value of Nature by way of references found in Indian philosophy.

As it is not feasible to take into account all the cases of environmental degradation happening across the world, a sample anthropological and social study is also included to derive the maximum implications that highlight the need for adopting environmental philosophical values.

The delimitations taken into considered in this study are listed below:

1) The whole study is taken with “environment” being the area of concern.

2) The ancient Indian scriptures are limited to Upanishads, Bhagavad-Gita and some Jaina and Vedantic literature.

3) Comparisons with contemporary Indian philosophers such as Swami Vivekananda, Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi, are also made.
Methodology

In order to integrate the study findings with Indian Philosophy, various methods have been adopted. The methods used are mainly inductive through interaction with people staying in city, village and tribal environments. Other methods like historical, analytical, synthetic and critical have also been adopted.

Chapterisation

The thesis consists of seven chapters after incorporating the modification that has been done during the course of collection of material and writing the thesis.

The introductory chapter gives an overall outlook of the whole thesis. It gives a basic introduction to the thesis and also states the importance, problem and objective of the thesis. It highlights the hypothesis, delimitations and methodology adopted in the study.

The first chapter links environment with philosophy and looks into various nuances of environment. The second chapter details about concept of Nature. It also has a narrative about contemporary philosophers take on Nature. The third chapter has a short note on a few ancient scriptures such as Prthvi Sukta, Vrikshayurveda, Ramayana’s Aranya Kanda and ancient environmental legislative issues and their relevance to environment.
The **fourth** chapter details about the environmental relationship had by humans with non-humans with a note on panchamahayajna and panchamahabhutas. The **fifth** chapter reveals the hazards caused to Nature through man’s “over-use” of his environment. Various aspects of environmental degradation are taken into consideration.

The **sixth** chapter analysis the disconnection of man with the environment and relates to ethical necessity in the present environmental crisis. The last and final **seventh** chapter deals with summary of all the preceding chapters and concludes with several suggestions that help in finding an ethical blueprint to overcome the serious environmental issues being faced globally.