Chapter Five:

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Through profound study of man and nature relationship, we conclude that western philosophy, including its religious traditions, propagates the view of anthropocentrism. Within Western philosophical tradition man holds dominating place over the rest of nature. In contrast to the nature, man has various special qualities like language capacity, rationality, thinking capacity and et al which have been the reason of his dominance over rest of the physical world. Due to specific qualities of man, Western philosophers put him at the centre of physical as well as moral world.

However, the anthropocentric position does not correspond with ecological sciences and post-modern scientific theories, such as theory of relativity and quantum theory. That is why, anthropocentric view of nature has rightly been criticized by ecocentrics. All these scientific findings suggest that man and nature are interconnected and interrelated to each other and it would be metaphysically as well as ethically wrong to treat them separate and independent. Actually, the tendency of separating man from nature leads to ecological disaster.

Justifying White's claim the analysis points out that the idea of man's detachment from nature has its root in the Genesis' theory of creation. The Bible apparently mentions that God created man from His own image and ordered him to exploit and control the nature and prosper.

Although White's claim about Christianity being the most anthropocentric religion of the world is right, but he mistakenly exaggerates the fact -what people think, they do accordingly and he overemphasises the role of religion concerning the ecological crisis.
since many factors, excluding religion, mould the thinking of human beings and contribute to ecological crisis.

Not unlike Christianity Greek philosophy offers a human enteric explanation of the world. Greek philosophers begin with the study of nature and believe that there is some kind of unity and harmony within the world. To understand this uniformity of world, all of them accept an underlying substance and explain the world accordingly. It follows that world has a rational structure to be understood by reason only which is especially restricted to humans. Their reliance on the capacity of human reason to understand the natural phenomena and nature as a subject matter of human inquiry ushers to further scientific development. Such view falls under the category of anthropocentrism within which man automatically gets the privilege over the rest of nature.

Undoubtedly, sophists are the first humanists who put 'man' at the centre of all kind of discourses and define truth and morality, as per man's perspective. The legacy of humanism is further escalated in the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle. It seems that Plato's idea that 'form' is real, permanent and pure, while matter is dead, impermanent and unreal, creates an epistemological, metaphysical as well as ethical dualism regarding the man/form and nature/matter interface. However, Aristotle tries his level best to overcome the Plato's 'form' and 'matter' dualism in favour of inseparable unity between the two, but could not succeed completely.

Aristotle believes in the final cause or purpose in nature forming a hierarchy of life form. In the Aristotle scheme of thought, within this purposed hierarchy with human at the top, lower organisms exist for the benefit of higher ones. As a result, Aristotle develops an anthropocentric view about the world. He offers a man centric ethics and develops an anti-ecological sentiments among men.
In contrast to Christianity and Greek philosophy, Vedic philosophy advocates ecocentric view about the world. Vedic philosophy moves with three main principles; namely Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, Vāsudeva Sarvam, Sarva-bhuta-hita. All these three principles present a unified picture of the world, where everything is interrelated and interconnected. However, Nelson does not support the idea and argues that Hinduism, especially Gītā like Christianity, supports man and nature dualism as well and its deterministic and antinomian tendency left no room for any moral responsibility towards the material world.

So far Nelson’s criticism is concerned, it may be noted that Nelson commits a methodological mistake. He does not understand the philosophical overtones of Gītā with context to other related concepts and drives his conclusion accordingly. The mere proposition about Purusha and Prakriti of Gītā being ontologically two separate entities shall not work, since there are so many passages suggesting that God resides everywhere in the universe.

Nelson has been unable to grasp the true meaning of Purusha and Prakriti, as Vedic seers proposed the two in related texts. He selects few exclusive verses from Gītā and uses them to render his specific intentions. Although, in its truest sense world can not be understood completely within itself because Brahmān (God) is the only cause of the universe that resides everywhere in the world.

The antinomian and deterministic tendencies of Gītā along with the concept of moksha to set free humans from all kind of moral responsibility concerning the ecological crisis can not take us long as well. The concept of Karmayogin and Dharma with relation to proposed determinism and moksha traces out the flaws in Nelson’s claim.

The humanist tendency which begins from the sophists reaches its peak during modern Western philosophy in the works of Bacon, Descartes, Newton, and Kant. Humanist thinkers challenge the
dogmatism of church and emphasize on free and critical thinking. With contrast to medieval orthodoxy humanists revive the dignity of man, his rationality, goals and values, and develop a new intellectual attitude towards the world among human beings.

Modern Western philosophy, consisting of humanistic values and goals, plays an essential and deciding role in formation of our relationship with nature. It provides a new dimension to man and nature relationship. It locates man at the centre of all kind of discourses, whether it is philosophical, political, sociological or economical and ethical as well. Likewise, modern Western philosophy establishes metaphysical dualism of man and nature and offers a human centric explanation of natural habitat. It projects human being as a separate, superior and independent being from the rest of nature.

In order to establish anthropocentric view, modern philosophy functions in two ways; firstly, notwithstanding the theological phenomenon, modern philosopher makes nature their focal point of study. To understand nature, modern philosophers propose new scientific methods of inquiry, based on experiment and observation. Through these newly proposed methods of inquiry nature's hidden laws become comprehensive and the feeling among men to control and subjugate the same grows stronger. With the help of newly propounded laws of nature modern philosophers like Descartes and Newton, offer mechanistic explanation of the world.

Secondly, the mechanistic worldview of Descartes and Newton debars nature from the realm of moral values, since nature, within it, just like a like a machine which run through the mechanical laws as Descartes suggest. In case values do not reside in the objective world, they have to be located in humans only. It follows that only humans have intrinsic values in the entire world and rest of the nature possesses instrumental values fulfilling human needs and purposes. Thus, modernism establishes man's domination over the rest of nature and propagates the idea of anthropocentrism.
During medieval period, the quest of nature starts with scientists' works. The scientific views of Copernicus and Kepler make world more rational and understandable. However, it was invention of telescope and observation based scientific findings by Galileo that make investigation of nature very authentic and reliable. On the basis of his scientific findings Galileo suggests a fundamental distinction between primary and secondary quality of a substance, later adopted by Descartes and proves to be an essential mean of man and nature dualism.

The basic philosophical ideas of Bacon, Descartes, and Newton prove to be final step in establishing anthropocentric view of nature. All these philosophers offer human centric view of nature under the influence of values and goals of enlightenment and humanism, and promote the idea that man and nature are two separate entities. Bacon is found to be convinced that nature exists for man's uses, necessitating him to make use of it for the betterment of his life with all control.

Through his method of doubt and reductionism Descartes declares that there are two separate and independent substances in the world- namely, mind and matter. While mind has the quality of thought, matter possesses the extension. Being a thinking entity man is the only locus of morality, while nature including man's body and animals is just like machines whose functioning can be explained by the law of mechanics.

Following Descartes, Newton also offers a mechanistic view of nature. According to him, physical world is made up of atoms, discrete particles, units that exist independently of each other and move according to mechanical laws. In Newtonian kind of worldview, man is alive, rational, and moral being, but nature is dead, passive and outside of moral values realm. Nature is made up for human needs and purposes. Not unlike its predecessors Newton too propagates anthropocentric view about nature.
Kant occupies a significant place in the history of Western philosophy. He reconciles both rationalists and empiricists to overcome the sceptic atmosphere about true and certain knowledge. For him true knowledge can be achieved by enlightened human being only that is why, he emphasizes the development of enlightenment rationality. In fact, the enlightenment era of thinking has influenced Kant a lot. He has a great regard to reason, a watchdog of enlightenment, and could not ignore its importance in knowledge formation; at the same time due to firm belief in empiricism he accepts the role of experience in knowledge formation. For Kant both experience and reason are necessary in acquiring knowledge.

On the basis of Kant's metaphysical and epistemological positions, we may conclude that his philosophy spawns several dualisms -such as, dualism of phenomenon and noumenon, understanding and sensibility, appearance and reality, faith and knowledge along with man and nature. However, these dualisms seem to be one of grades and not of kinds. In addition, Kant offers a teleological explanation of the world and puts forth hierarchy among physical entities with man, being on top, as the only moral agent with intrinsic values. Hence, it may be concluded that Kantian philosophy advocates anthropocentrism.

Meanwhile, Kant implies his epistemological and metaphysical findings in ethical domain as well and maintains man and nature dualism. But with contrast to metaphysics and epistemology, man and nature dualism seems quite clear in ethical realm too. For Kant, reason is the dividing tool of man and nature. Since in Kant's view human is the only being on planet which bears the sense of maxims of morality and who can acts accordingly.

Though, reason based theory of morality by Kant does not match with the findings of Johnson and socio-biologists like Dr. de Waal. Johnson states that some other elements, like compassion provide enough evidence to include animals in the realm of moral agent, while
for Dr. de Waal reason alone is not the only criteria for being a moral agent rather empathy and reciprocity are also necessary for qualifying the status of moral agent.

In short, it seems quite apparent that Kant's reason based moral philosophy has serious flaws. Within the Kantian framework, it becomes very difficult to explain why various behaviours of animals derived from empathy and reciprocity can not come under the category of moral act, while experiments show the other way round. Kant's claim about humans, being the only reason bearer entity of the world and the only moral agents with their acts as moral acts, looks one sided and anthropocentric.

Critically speaking, reason and consciousness as a ground of being moral agent do not carry much significance. Findings by philosophers and socio-biologists give us enough space to argue that possession of reason and sense of morality is not the only criteria for being a moral agent, rather some other characteristics like compassion, empathy and reciprocity as well are efficient criteria for being considered as moral agent.

Finally, it may be mentioned that man centric tendency of modern Western philosophy causes ecological crisis. And the emergence of ecological crisis raises question on the basic philosophy of anthropocentrism. Anthropocentric view does not match with the findings of ecological sciences and twentieth century physics. To describe man and nature relationship, post modern sciences offer valuable insights that challenge the basic edifice of anthropocentric view. It seems that man centric approach towards nature is main cause of ecological ills. The variance with anthropocentric view forces men to find alternative to it so that a more participatory relationship between man and nature could be developed. This newly proposed view of nature is known as ecocentric view.
Essentially, before coming to the issue of man and nature interface and its relationship with ecological crisis, it would be better to have a prior knowledge about nature and characteristic of ecological problems and its categorization. It helps us in enhancing the understanding of man and nature relationship comprehensively. So far the nature and meaning of ecological problem is concerned, it may be noted that ecological problems are an outcome of human intervention into natural processes or human alteration of nature, as Passmore and Bonnett suggest, on one hand and that ecological problems are not purely scientific in nature, rather it has many other social, cultural, economical, political and, most importantly, philosophical dimensions on the other.

Consequently, on the basis of specific nature of ecological problem, Passmore's position seems quite approachable that ecological problems are the result of man's dealing with nature and ecological problems are not same as the problems of ecology, since problem of ecology/environmental problem is mainly a scientific problem rather than a philosophical problem. That is why these problems can be solved only through understanding of natural phenomenon, while for the solution of ecological problem a more comprehensive philosophical study is needed.

Finally, it may be noted that the sustainable development, same as dominant model of development believes in anthropocentrism and the non-ending capacity of humans to tread on the path of development with skills to overcome ecological crisis. As a matter of fact, sustainable development came in to existence due to the constant criticism of dominant model of development by ecocentrics and continuous resistance of dominant model of development by various world environmental organizations, world leaders and intellectuals. It was believed that through sustainable development men can grow infinitely without harming the natural environment.
However, in case of sustainable development, one may note that it also has various flaws same as dominant model of development. Basically, it is too believe in the basic premises of anthropocentric view and does not challenge the basic philosophy of it. That is why, one may sum up that sustainable development can not resolve ecological crisis since, like anthropocentrism, it also accept man and nature dualism on one hand and man dominance over nature on the other.

In fact, to solve ecological crisis a fundamental change among humans about anthropocentric view is needed. In order to live in a world free of ecological crisis one has to make qualitative change in his/her approach towards nature and redefine man and nature relationship from ecological perspective. Moreover, ecological sciences and twentieth century physics too offers a methodological support to the ecocentric view. Thus, on the basis of ecocentric approach men can develop a new participatory ethics where man and nature enjoy the luxury of equal importance. According to participatory ethics, nature like man is an equal subject, not an object to be controlled.

Participatory ethics suggests that human community is in sustainable ecological relationship with its surrounding natural community. Human beings are neither inferior to nature nor dominated by it as believed by ecocentrics, also nor superior to it because of their sciences and technology, as anthropocentrics believe. Rather human beings and non-human nature are equal partners in survival.