

## Ethical Correlates of Environmental Consciousness among Members and Non-Members of Nature Club

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### ABSTRACT

The need and relevance of the concerns for nature and a pro-environmental attitude and behaviour is at its peak in the present world. It has been long recognized that ecological balance and safety of nature is central to human existence on earth. Despite this understanding, human activities are deteriorating the earth. If this situation is allowed to continue, the earth will soon turn out to be a useless and lifeless planet, along with marking the very end of human existence. One way to tackle this crisis is to reduce and prevent human actions that pose threats to nature and environment. A sustainable change in such actions is achieved effectively only by bringing about a change in ethics, values and attitudes of people. Ethics refers to a code of conduct. Values held by people contribute to their ethics. Since values are acquired, it can be instilled into people through different means; also implying that they are changeable. The concept of environmental consciousness refers to specific psychological factors related to individual's propensity to engage in pro-environmental behaviors (Zelezny & Schultz, 2000:367). Environmental consciousness can also be addressed as the psychological dimension of pro-environmental behavior. **Objectives:** The purpose of the present study is to investigate the 'ethical correlates of environmental consciousness among members and non-members of nature club'. **Method:** (a) **Participants:** The study was conducted on 54 high school students from various schools in Ernakulam district, Kerala. Participants included both members (n=21) and non-members (n=33) of any kind of nature club. (b) **Materials:** The Ethical Values Assessment (EVA- Jensen & Padilla, 2004) and New Ecological Paradigm Scale- Revised (NEP Revised- Dunlap, R. E., & Van Liere, K., Mertig, A., & Jones, R. E., 2000). EVA measures 3 categories of ethics, namely: Ethics of Autonomy, Ethics of Community and Ethics of Divinity. NEP scale assesses ecological worldview along 5 dimensions, namely: Reality of Limits to Growth, Ant anthropocentrism, Fragility of Nature's Balance, Rejection of Exemptionalism and the Possibility of Eco-crisis. (c) **Analysis:** Analysis was done using 't- test' and 'correlation'. (d)

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**Results:** There is significant difference between members and non-members of nature club in the dimensions Ethics of community, Overall ethics, Overall ecological worldview and Awareness of the possibility of eco-crisis. Students with membership in nature clubs have higher Ethics of community, Overall ethics, Overall ecological worldview (significance at 5% level) and Awareness of the possibility of eco-crisis (significance at 1% level). Also, Overall ethics has a significant positive correlation with Overall ecological worldview. **Conclusion:** Membership in nature club is found to enhance better environmental consciousness and ethics. The study implies that making students part of nature clubs facilitate pro-environmental behavior and better ethics.

**Keywords:** *Ethics, Environmental consciousness, Nature club, Ethics of Community, Possibility of Eco-crisis, New Ecological Paradigm.*

**H**umans and nature are two inseparable entities. The bond between man and environment is so inextricably interwoven such that whatever happens to the environment is reflected on man's life, and whatsoever is man's action is sure to have impacts in the environment. This divine relationship has been recognized by almost all cultures and traditions, especially the Indian tradition and has been wonderfully documented in ancient Indian literatures like Vedas, Upanishads, Puranas etc (Renugadevi, 2012). The ancient Hindu tribes who dwelled in forests and on mountains did a major hand on preserving the biodiversity rich dense forest patches. According to the verses in Rig-Veda: "the sky is like father, the earth like mother and the space as their son. The universe consisting of the three is like a family and any kind of damage done to any one of the three throws the universe out of balance" (David, 1980). Another verse from Rig-Veda says "Thousands and Hundreds of years if you want to enjoy the fruits and happiness of life then take up systematic planting of trees." (Dwivedi & Tiwari, 1987). The Iso- Upanishad has verses holding for the importance of peaceful co-existence of all organisms. The Puranas equate planting trees to repentance from sins (Renugadevi, 2011). A number of verses from the Noble Qur'an and the Holy Bible allude to the importance of environment and environmental protection: "eat and drink from the provision of Allah, and do not commit abuse on the earth spreading corruption" (The Noble Qur'an, 2:60); "the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden to work it and keep it" (The Holy Bible- Genesis, 2:15). Despite these age-old recognitions of the inevitable human-nature relationships, people at present largely neglect and ruin this divine bond. The improper use of natural resources, uneconomical constructions, lethal pollutants etc poses serious threats to the exquisite décor of human-environment kinship. It is in this poignant context that there arises the need for exploring deeper into the idea of environmental consciousness; its relevance in bringing about pro-environmental behaviours and other factors tied to the concept.

According to the Environment Protection Act of 1986: "environment includes water, air and land, and the inter-relationship which exists among and between water, air and land, and human beings, other living creatures, plants, microorganisms and property"(as cited in Tiwari, 2009).

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The concept of environmental consciousness refers to specific psychological factors related to individual's propensity to engage in pro-environmental behaviors (Zelezny & Schultz, 2000). Environmental consciousness can also be addressed as the psychological dimension of pro-environmental behavior. Environmental consciousness has several dimensions, namely: affective, dispositional, cognitive and active. The affective dimension of environmental consciousness includes the values or general beliefs about human-environment relationship. This dimension has been explored much by Dunlap and van Liere. According to Dunlap et al (2000); these kinds of values and general beliefs about human-environment relationships largely influence pro-environmental behaviours. Dispositional dimension of environmental consciousness hold sense of responsibility and self-efficacy for actions in favour of the environment. Cognitive dimension of environmental consciousness is concerned with the knowledge regarding environmental problems. The cognitive dimension is imperative for triggering personal obligation for pro-environmental behaviours, values etc. The active dimension of environmental consciousness includes behaviours like taking part in nature clubs, adhering to eco-friendly lifestyle, recycling etc.

Environmental consciousness derives from many factors. 'Ethics' is one among the important factors that influence environmental consciousness. Ethics refer to the etiquettes of conduct. They are the moral principles that steer a person's behavior. Values held by people contribute to their ethics. According to Stern & Dietz (1994), attitudes of environmental concern are rooted in a person's value system; values placed on oneself, others, plants and animals (as cited in Schultz, 2000). The five paths leading to lasting profound affection to nature, identified by Swan (2000) are: becoming well-informed, serving a sense of social justice, concern for personal and public health, seeking personal health and fitness, and profound emotional or spiritual experiences (as cited in Swan, 2010). According to the Norm-Activation theory of Altruism by Schwartz (1972, 1977), pro-environmental behaviours result from moral norms held by the person and the activation of such moral norms requires the person's belief that his or her pro-environmental behaviours will prevent the threatening consequences of environmental problems. Stern, Dietz & Kalof (1993) identified self-interest, altruism towards other humans and altruism towards other species and biosphere as the main value orientations pertaining to environmentalism (as cited in Stern, Dietz, Abel, Guagnano & Kalof; 1999). "Egoistic values predispose people to protect aspects of the environment that affect them personally, or to oppose protection of the environment if the personal costs are perceived as high" (Stern & Dietz, 1994). According to Olli, Grendstad & Wolleback (2001), the only factor that enhances environmental behaviours is the social context. Study by Kortenkamp & Moore (2001) show that ecocentric and anthropocentric ethics are tied closely to pro-environmental actions. General pro-environmental behaviours are influenced by factors like value orientation, environmental beliefs and norms (cited in Nordlund & Garvill, 2002). General environmental concerns are predicted better by self-transcendence values (Schultz, Gouveia, Cameron, Tankha, Schmuck & Franek, 2005). Biocentric values with intrinsic worth of nature are found to be strongly linked to pro-

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environmental attitudes and dedication to environmental protection (Perkins & Brown, 2012). Studies show that altruistic values have stronger connections with pro-environmental actions (Dietz et al., 1998; Karp, 1996; Stern & Dietz, 1994; Stern, Dietz, Kalof & Guagnano, 1995). Related researches by Joireman, Lasane, Bennett, Richards and Solaimani; Van Vugt & Samuelson (1998) show that people with prosocial value orientations show greater environmental concerns than people with individualistic values (as cited in Stern, 2000). A study by Samarasinghe (2012) found that ethical values are positively correlated to pro-environmental attitudes.

All the existing studies imply the role of values, norms etc on environmental consciousness. These findings pave the way for the assumption that certain ethical values correlate with the concept of environmental consciousness.

The need and relevance of the concerns for nature and a pro-environmental attitude and behaviour is at its peak in the present world. It has been long recognized that ecological balance and safety of nature is central to human existence on earth. Despite this understanding, human activities are deteriorating the earth. If this situation is allowed to continue, the earth will soon turn out to be a useless and lifeless planet, along with marking the very end of human existence. One way to tackle this crisis is to reduce and prevent human actions that pose threats to nature and environment. A sustainable change in such actions is achieved effectively only by bringing about a change in ethics, values and attitudes of people.

Ethics are different from values in that they are moral values set by society or a larger group to be accepted and followed, whereas values are confined to the individual acquired on personal will. Since values are acquired, it can be instilled into people through different means; also implying that they are changeable. Identifying the ethical correlates of environmental consciousness aids better in formulating a code of ethic that presumably augment environmental concerns and pro-environmental behaviors.

The target group of the present study is high school students with and without membership in nature clubs. This facilitates affirming the idea that being part of pro-environmental groups adds to environmental consciousness. This specific target group is especially important because high school education is the period during which students start gaining a more rational understanding of ethics, values etc; and hence the actual ethical values contributing to their environmental concerns can be precisely deciphered and manipulated.

### ***Objective***

- The purpose of the present study is to investigate the 'ethical correlates of environmental consciousness among members and non-members of nature club'.

## METHOD

### Participants

The study was conducted on 54 high school students from various schools in Ernakulam district, Kerala. Participants included both members (n=21) and non-members (n=33) of any kind of nature club.

### Materials

The Ethical Values Assessment (EVA- Jensen & Padilla, 2004) and New Ecological Paradigm Scale- Revised (NEP Revised-Dunlap, R. E., & Van Liere, K., Mertig, A., & Jones, R. E., 2000). EVA measures 3 categories of ethics, namely: Ethics of Autonomy, Ethics of Community and Ethics of Divinity. NEP scale assesses ecological worldview along 5 dimensions, namely: Reality of Limits to Growth, Ant anthropocentrism, Fragility of Nature's Balance, Rejection of Exemptionalism and the Possibility of Eco-crisis. All the tests were locally standardized

### Analysis

Analysis was done using 't- test' and 'correlation'.

## RESULTS

Results are summarized in table 1.

*Table 1. Mean scores, standard deviations and 't' values for the three categories of ethics, overall ethics, overall ecological worldview and five dimensions of ecological worldview obtained by participants with and without membership in nature clubs.*

Dimensions	Group		t values
	With membership in nature club Mean ± SD	Without membership in nature club Mean ± SD	
<b>Ethic of Autonomy</b>	28.86 ± 1.769	28.45 ± 1.481	0.903
<b>Ethic of Community</b>	29 ± 1.673	27.76 ± 1.768	2.57*
<b>Ethic of Divinity</b>	29.05 ± 1.746	28.33 ± 1.915	1.382
<b>Overall Ethics</b>	86.90 ± 4.312	84.55 ± 3.841	2.098*
<b>Reality of Limits to Growth</b>	8.52 ± 1.806	7.45 ± 1.679	2.216*
<b>Ant anthropocentrism</b>	13.67 ± 1.742	13.03 ± 1.704	1.326
<b>Fragility of Nature's Balance</b>	11.76 ± 2.427	11.79 ± 2.190	-0.041
<b>Rejection of Exemptionalism</b>	10.14 ± 2.128	10.97 ± 1.794	-1.535
<b>Possibility of Eco-crisis</b>	13.10 ± 1.814	11.33 ± 2.380	2.895**
<b>Overall Ecological Worldview</b>	57.19 ± 3.919	54.58 ± 4.918	2.054*

\*denotes significance at 5% level, \*\*denotes significance at 1% level

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The results clearly indicate that there is significant difference between members and non-members of nature club in the dimensions Ethics of community, Overall ethics, Reality of Limits to Growth, Overall ecological worldview and Awareness of the possibility of eco-crisis. Students with membership in nature clubs have higher Ethics of community, Overall ethics, Overall ecological worldview (significance at 5% level) and Awareness of the possibility of eco-crisis (significance at 1% level). Also, Overall ethics has a significant positive correlation with Overall ecological worldview.

## **DISCUSSION**

The overall results of the study indicate better environmental consciousness and ethics among members of nature clubs.

Being part of nature clubs promote pro-environmental attitudes and behaviours by making students engage in activities like planting trees, vegetable cultivation, cleaning of premises etc. This can be substantiated with the finding of Dunlap et al (2000); that the values and general beliefs about human-environment relationships largely influence pro-environmental behaviours. Students in such groups also get better informed about recycling things, moving to eco-friendly products, factors causing harm to the environment and the like. All these in turn shape the students thoughts and behaviours in such a way that is sensitive to the demands required to live in tune with the nature and environment. This is attained only by adhering to certain values and ethics. General pro-environmental behaviours are influenced by factors like value orientation, environmental beliefs and norms (cited in Nordlund and Garvill, 2002).

The ethics one holds influence one's attitudes towards environment. According to Stern and Dietz (1994), attitudes of environmental concern are rooted in a person's value system; values placed on oneself, others, plants and animals (as cited in Schultz, 2000). The five paths leading to lasting profound affection to nature, identified by Swan (2000) are: becoming well-informed, serving a sense of social justice, concern for personal and public health, seeking personal health and fitness, and profound emotional or spiritual experiences (as cited in Swan, 2010). Consistent with these findings are the results of this study indicating that, overall ethics has a significant positive correlation with overall ecological worldview; and also, Ethic of Community is better among members of nature club. The finding that members of nature club have better Ethic of Community is in line with the findings of Olli, Grendstad & Wolleback (2001), that; the only factor that enhances environmental behaviours is the social context. Ethic of Community encompasses community-oriented virtues, concern for others' physical and psychological well-being, harmony goals etc. Better Ethic of Community among members of nature clubs can be attributed to a shared sense of unity with other beings derived from the joint activities within the club; feeling of belongingness towards the plants and animals around etc. the findings of Stern, Dietz & Kalof (1993) that self-interest, altruism towards other humans and altruism towards other species and biosphere are the main value orientations pertaining to environmentalism (as

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cited in Stern, Dietz, Abel, Guagnano & Kalof; 1999); substantiate our assumptions. Studies also show that altruistic values have stronger connections with pro-environmental actions (Dietz et al., 1998; Karp, 1996; Stern & Dietz, 1994; Stern, Dietz, Kalof & Guagnano, 1995). Related researches by Joireman, Lasane, Bennett, Richards and Solaimani; Van Vugt & Samuelson (1998) show that people with prosocial value orientations show greater environmental concerns than people with individualistic values (as cited in Stern, 2000). Study by Kortenkamp and Moore (2001) show that ecocentric and anthropocentric ethics are tied closely to pro-environmental actions.

Members of nature clubs are also better aware of the 'Reality of Limits to Growth' and about the 'Possibility of Eco-crisis'. Being part of nature clubs, students are greatly exposed to awareness campaigns and nature protection consortiums which in turn expand their recognition of realities concerning nature and human existence; such as that of population explosion, limitations of natural resources, rampant pollutions, consequences of global warming and the like. Better the awareness, greater are the pupil's motivation to work for nature.

All such concerns are presumably tied to favourable ecological worldview and deep concern for nature. Based on the above findings it can be concluded that membership in nature club is found to enhance better environmental consciousness and ethics. Also, Ethics of Community is closely related to environmental consciousness. The study implies that making students part of nature clubs facilitate pro-environmental behavior and better ethics. The limitation of the study is that it was conducted on a small sample confined to Ernakulam district in Kerala and the participants were restricted to only high school students.

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### ***Conflict of Interests***

The author declared no conflict of interests.

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