



Original Article

Ecological Solidarity: A Philosophical Analysis through Societal-Environmental Dialectic

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Abstract: This research paper attempts to explicate the potential and significance of ecological solidarity in the contemporary world. Through the works of Allan Schnaiberg, an American sociologist, the paper aims to analyze the interfering factors such as power structures, role of individuals, role of state in environmental awareness and preservation. As the works on ecological solidarity are minimal or are available only through a few state policies, the paper experiences limitations of resources. Despite limitation, the study constructs arguments derived from the data and information provided by sources that focus on solidarity, awareness, and compassion towards environment.

Key Words: Environment, Economy, Ecology, Solidarity, Capitalism

Introduction: The notions of justice, equality, rights and freedom have grasped a central position in the contemporary world. The demand for equality, just sharing of resources, preservation of one's belief system, and protection of human rights are enshrined in the Handbook for Parliamentarians prepared by Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)². From the last few decades, people have realized that to apply ethical and moral

principles in day-to-day life are more important than merely believing in them. This amalgamation of struggle for rights on the one hand, and adherence to values on the other hand, brings difficulties in individuals' life. In this difficulty, an addition is made when economic and power structures begin to play their role.

While an increased focus on rights in human life is perceivable in the contemporary world, their maintenance is still not adhered. In recent

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times, human rights have been sought along with environmental rights³. This ideology began because a clean, healthy, sustainable environment is necessity in today's world. Katrina Zimmer, while writing about the impact of human rights on nature says that a clean, healthy, sustainable environment, a balanced ecosystem and climate are primary for a dignified human existence⁴. It is thus believed that human rights are intertwined with environmental rights^{3,4}.

The Deloitte Global 2021 Millennial and Gen Z Survey, explicates that millennials and gen Z's are not passive actors to issues of justice, equality, rights and freedom, but their efforts are still incapable to reverse the environmental degradation and climate change because of severe lack on the parts of governments⁵. UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (UNEP) says that the economic structures and governances still do over-exploitation of natural resources and thus are harming the environment and causing alarming situations for future generations⁶. These two reports tell that the practices for environmental preservation are still minimal. Though 110 countries, globally, have constitutionally realized the need of human rights for a healthy environment, these countries belonging to the global-south experience a huge gap in implementing environmental preservation and sustainability practices⁴. Social contracts (an agreement consisting of individuals moral and/or political obligations according to the society they are a part of⁷) in past, and human contracts (an agreement by law⁸) in present, does not include the need of environmental laws^{9,10}. As the notions of rights, justice, are often left beside when one talks about environment, here in this article, we aim to

conclude with moral considerations that must be offered beforehand for environmental affairs. As the article provides philosophical analysis, the arguments for ecological solidarity will be arising from value laden ideas, moral principles and ethical norms. Though the article does not employ any analytical tools of economics, it focuses in assessing both ecological concerns and significance of values. Moreover, while keeping societal-environmental dialectic as primary in discussion, we assess the ideologies of economic synthesis, planned scarcity synthesis, and ecological synthesis.

Methodology: An in-depth literature review was done with the help of resources found in digital libraries namely JSTOR and National *Digital Library* of India (NDLI). Help was taken from various educational sites and websites for analysing current debates related to environment, economy and politics. Before addressing the notions of solidarity, values, ethics and morals, literature related to philosophy were studied extensively. Though the development of all the major notions in the present article keep societal-environmental dialectic as a central theme, many notions also reflect on the virtues of eco-Marxism. Books, chapters, articles, newsletters, and reports consisting of literature discussing the interference of power structures, economy, and social expansion with environment are primarily sought for the development of arguments in the article. The research article, done through the technique of exploratory research methodology, is a result of extensive literature review.

For a better understanding the paper is divided into two major parts. The first part

discusses the societal-environmental dialectic and is further divided into two sub-parts namely economic synthesis and planned scarcity synthesis, where inclination of power structures and low participation of individuals and the state is discussed respectively. The second part of the paper discusses ecological solidarity through ecological synthesis. It is further divided into three sub-parts namely, virtue of realizing interdependence, combating the environmental disruption and as a value? The paper ends with conclusion and a way forward.

Societal-Environmental Dialectic: In environmental ethics, when we talk about the protection of natural entities and judicious use of natural resources, the paradigm of environmental sociology becomes important to talk about. Here, the call for social justice through environmental justice is sought. Societal-environmental dialectic, propounded by Allan Schnaiberg, explicates the impact of political policy and economic growth on ecological concerns. His ideas are important from this present research's perspective because, it give ground to develop ideas related to power dynamics and its impact on environment¹¹.

However, Schnaiberg sought the need of societal-environmental dialectic because of the lack by many social scientists in understanding the role of economy and power in organizations. He mentions the need of dialectic to analyse the economic expansions causing increased environmental extracting¹². An increased extraction in return causes depletion of natural resources and as a result, the rise in ecological problems act as restrictions to any further economic expansion¹³. By

asking very significant questions like "what level of ecological disruption is acceptable for what level of economic expansions?" and "what level of ecological protection is acceptable for what level of reductions in economic expansion?", he dives into the paradoxes running in the social and political world. Where on one hand he explicates the forthcoming scarcity of resources because of massive economic expansion, on the other hand, through his analysis of distributive injustices, he explains that when the injustice is bared by people of deprived groups in the distribution of goods and services, they automatically seek more economic expansion^{12,13}.

Moreover, Schnaiberg's two concepts from the dialectic namely, *economic synthesis* and *planned scarcity synthesis* will help us in addressing the question, what are the problems arising because of economic expansion? Economic synthesis is the central point of focus is economic expansion. Here, the depletion of localized resources and expansion of material substitution prevails over ecological concerns. In planned scarcity, which is a second step in dialectic, the government regulations for ecological concerns, through their technology and social organisations are merely an appearance¹³. The former mentions the focus of structural organisations of countries on maximised production whereas the latter explains the narrowest concern of government agencies on ecological problems. Similar ideas, relating to expansion and scarcity are found in Schnaiberg's another work named, *The Environment: From Surplus to Scarcity*¹⁴. Here, the basic arguments arises from the analysis of the working industrial

production system. While focusing on the social injustices arising because of increased production at the cost of environment, he mentions lack of focus on ecological concerns by people¹⁵. The social deterioration of both environment and people is presented as a power abuse that focuses simply on selling-purchasing of good and expansions of economies^{14, 15}.

However, when more societies developed into advance systems, they began to perceive political upheavals, depressions, and scarcity of resources¹⁶. A similar reference is given in an article by Tejvan Pettinger, where he says that economic growth certainly ruins the environment, which in turn acts as a brake on the growth¹⁷. Schnaiberg, thus mentions that uncertainties are prevailed both in economy and environment. He said, "For ecosystems, these external threats include those of human economies; and for economies, they include destructive ecosystem conditions."¹⁸ The above exposition explicates that even though both (economy and environment) must have worked in harmony, now act as destructive forces against each other.

Schnaiberg's arguments are drawn through neo-Marxist notions of power expansion, making of oppressed, injustice, and deterioration of deprived groups¹⁵. As he believed that in an industrial system, the demand of capitalists is to expand production or production over the time becomes capital intensive. The focus on production for economic growth causes many countries struck on a treadmill that neither helps in economic development nor prevents the destruction of environment. This lose-lose situation is defined by Schnaiberg as "Treadmill arguments"¹⁹.

The well-being of people is not achieved even when environment is sacrificed for economic growth. The argument further proves the loss of ecological stability because of unsustainable damage done to the environment.^{15,19}

Elkan has given a critical analysis of the work of Schnaiberg²⁰. Schnaiberg mentions an absolute isolation of environment when talking about economy, which later results in social injustice²¹. Economists explain that firstly, growth in economy is preferred by society, and increased production is sought by the people which leads to social evolution and growth, secondly, that economic growth do promote awareness towards the environment and thirdly, that the usage of resources are indeed important for economic growth, but they are not done with aim of wasting them, rather it is done efficiently²⁰.

However, the approaches to perceive the environment varies. On one hand we can perceive arguments arising from the ideologies of anthropocentrism and ecocentrism, on the other hand, while focusing on growth and economic expansion, we see arguments arising from the ideologies of industrocentrism. Industrocentrism can critique the perspectives of Schnaiberg because of his urge to keep environment over and above the economic expansion¹³. But, his societal-environmental dialectic, having the notions such as ecological synthesis and managed scarcity explain not only the need of thinking for environment before economy but also explains why this is the only way.

Before moving towards the third and most important notion of the societal-environmental dialectic of Schnaiberg *Ecological Synthesis*, we aim to further understand the contemporary relevance of Schnaiberg's notions of *economic synthesis* and *planned scarcity synthesis*.

Economic Synthesis: The Inclination of Power Structures: Power structures of a country comprises of its government and its state organisation. From past two decades, world saw a significant shift in ideologies of countries towards rapid expansion of their economic structures, that resulted in shift of power towards money-holding rich organisations. As money-holding organisations achieve their status because of the capital they possess, their key focus is grounded in the inflow of money. It was said three decades ago that for modern industrial system the most significant notion is the flow of money¹⁸. But, according to environmentalist, since none of world economies are concentrating on environmental issues, the deterioration of ecology is imperative²². Decades later, we see their inferences about the upcoming world, as true. The world is suffering from global warming, pollution of land, water, air, extinction of variety of species, deterioration of rain forests, and so on²³.

To bring capitalism into concern while talking about environment and ecology is important because majority of nations in the world are moving towards plutocracy, and the greed for expansion of power through capital increase²⁴. The ecological concerns are left aside because of money driven ideologies – all resources on earth are for human utilization, resources are inexhaustible, economic stability will bring environmental stability, and so on.

Often, capitalism make this promise that when all the institutions of country becomes stable, stability in human life and environmental concerns can be well taken care off. This indication of environmental stability as directly propositional with economic stability often showcases itself as a false narrative. Moreover, Movahed says, the incentive based work given to the individuals does not include incentives for preserving the environment. He further adds, that a strict capitalist behaviour which focus on profit makes environment subjugated to capitalist mode of production²⁵.

Capitalism is at the highest level of power structures. Its massively holds both direct and indirect impact on the society and on the lives of people. It can endlessly work in providing significant change and progress of the society. As profit maximization is the central concern, the field's focus on increasing consumerism is a central thing. Monetary stability might be beneficial for the betterment of position of people in a nation. But, as profits are important for growth of capitalism, the inclination of power structure (capitalism) is not on ecological concerns. An intervention of social forces are extremely significant to safeguard our planet, and capitalism as an economic force cannot move towards this particular goal²⁵. The result of such an outlook is massive destruction of environment and huge loss of ecological balance. Iizuka mentions, that the growth of a country economically will enable them to afford technology that is ecologically sound still loses its edge²⁶. Practical instances, he says, showcases that despite of developed economies have adopted ecologically sound policies, the

environmental standards are still worsening²⁶.

Planned Scarcity Synthesis: Low Participation of Individuals and the State:

The movement towards the preservation of environment is crucial in restructuring the modern perspective of the world²³. But this movement cannot be completed if the actions of individuals and state are not talked about. Organizations and people who have common agendas for preservation of environment are required so that this restructuring of the society, with having environmental concerns as central could be taken care of¹⁵. In recent times, ecosystems have lost the capacity to serve the needs of goods by individuals or fulfil the desire of political-economic power by organizations²⁷. The low participation of both state and individuals in agendas such as recycle, reuse, and compost, have caused the failure of environmental movements²⁶. Moreover, despite of understanding the carbon print of actions performed in daily life, people and organisations act unaware of their actions. Negligence in actions by majority of population of earth has caused massive ecological imbalance that have resulted in global warming, ozone depletion and loss of biodiversity^{23,26}. A recent report by Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) says that the climate change is intensifying and many trends of the nature are now irreversible. It is held by the experts that if carbon and greenhouse gas emission is controlled, many of natural problems can be reversed in 20-30 years²⁸. UN climate report asserts “Human influence has unequivocally warmed the planet”. Their report suggested that majority of consequences causing

problems in environment are tied to human activity²⁹.

Preserving the biodiversity, caring for the rainforests, aiming to protect the endangered species is a movement towards ecological preservation. With an urge by environmental conservationists towards the protection of environment, many discourses and ideologies emerged concerning the environmental awareness²⁶. Despite of the all the efforts towards environmental preservation, the contribution of individuals and the state is still minimal²⁶. The reason on surface level is unawareness of individuals and state about ecological issues³⁰. But, an in-depth analysis tell us that the actions performed are not a result of unawareness, but of deliberate choice. Monbiot, through his analysis explicates, for years it was told to humans by the ruling power structures, that economic growth will save the natural world, when actually the opposite was true. He quotes from the findings of Oxford University’s smith school, where it is suggested that poorer countries are often more concerned about their actions towards the environment, as compared to the rich countries. Countries like India, Bangladesh, Nepal, China, Mexico, Brazil and most areas of African subcontinent feel the most consumer guilt³¹.

From past two decades, an upheaval of environmental awareness has come into picture. Citizens participation on global agendas are sought because it was realized that there is a potential in individuals’ behaviour to induce certain values in the system that might have long term positive effects on the environment²⁶.

Though there are limited studies on how the impact of environmental awareness can significantly change the course of depleting ecosystems, the negative impact of unawareness is deeply worked upon. The scarcity of environmental resources has caused major economic, health and environmental crisis around the world. With each UN report on environment, we see how earth is suffering huge crisis because of lack of participation of both individuals and state. Water scarcity, droughts, floods, scarcity of food, have collapsed the livelihood of people around the world. The frequency of intensity was grown because of the arrival of COVID-19 pandemic³². Despite of the vulnerable conditions across the world, some real big questions are, Does anyone really care about the environment? Would people ever will choose environment over luxury/comfort? Will state organizations and power structures will ever let their organizations suffer from loss, because they don't want the environment to suffer? These simple yet significant questions encourage us to have a clear picture of how environmental concerns are still secondary concerns in the present world.

Ecological Synthesis: Understanding Ecological Solidarity: Ecological synthesis is the third and final step of societal-environmental dialectic. It is regarded as the highest level of the dialectic as here, through a synthesis, movement is planned towards social policies that seeks a substantial control over both production and consumption¹³. The synthesis considers a serious restructuring to maintain peace in the society, without a rise in environment vulnerability.

The restructuring works with smaller adjustments comprising of social or ecological changes. But, the major impact of this restructuring can be upon the treadmill organization, leading to its disruption³³. This perhaps is the reason that Schnaiberg, in his work propagates that, social peace, in a strict sense cannot prevail through ecological synthesis. But, he imposes on the significance of ecological synthesis because, it is only through this part of dialectic one can understand that social injustices can be solved not through economic expansion but through a judicial use of environment for both production and consumption¹³.

Inspired by Schnaiberg's ecological synthesis model, the aim here is to move towards ecological solidarity. Solidarity is a diverse concept having variety of meanings for different people. In the course of human history, ranging from emotions of friendship, love, care, bonding, and so on, solidarity possess many forms of feelings and understandings. It is often understood as a feeling of reciprocal sympathy where group of people support each other³⁴. As promotion of mutual support is an essential character of solidarity, it often stands as a counter to notion of individualism, and help in eradication of human isolation and fragmentation of life. Freire, while talking about solidarity and its significance says, "The pursuit of full humanity, however, cannot be carried out in isolation or individualism, but only in fellowship and solidarity"³⁵.

In the field of ecology, where interdependence is a key phenomenon, solidarity plays an important role. Here, when we talk about ecological solidarity

we can see that the field perceivably draws many of its notions from the field of philosophy. Michelot and Aseeva explains that the concept of ecological solidarity first came into existence when amendments in Act on the National Park in France was prepared. It was then taken up by many reformations where work was done on ecosystems. Their explanation make ecological solidarity on one hand, an activity that analyse potential environmental risks and tries to decrease the loss of ecosystem, and on the other hand it takes into consideration many complex socio-ecosystems³⁶.

Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights, gave a special position to solidarity. It was mentioned in the declaration that freedom in contemporary times must be sought not only through isolated works of individual, rather, it must be personified through a display of co-operation in both social and political frameworks. With a belief in unique capacity of humans, UDBHR encouraged focus of individuals on their own existence and their environment³⁷. Solidarity, acting as a virtue in the protecting the environment, focus in formation of community, and thus, mutually move towards the preservation of environment. In this movement, where individual begin to sacrifice for others, one can perceive formation of fascinating dimensions of ecology. Here, the balance in environment is not a resultant of natural phenomenon but, is a resultant of human care. Thompson, Mathevet, Delanoë, Gil-Fourrier, Bonnin, and Cheylan, while explaining ecological solidarity as a conceptual tool, defines it as a concept arising through the realization of individuals towards a common goal. Here,

the individuals are conscious of their shared responsibility³⁸. Thus, ecological solidarity, as a flourishing field in environmental discourse, offer a mutuality of concern. Jennings adds that solidarity in environmental issues is important because it essentially control human desires. He explains ecological solidarity as a principle that call humans to understand that nature is not a mere raw material for fulfilling our needs, rather it is a habitat for all living beings³⁹.

With its focus on interconnectedness and well-being, ecological solidarity provides space for argumentation for the concerns of environmental degradation arising because of misuse of economic resources and power abuse.

Ecological solidarity, therefore can act as an excellent tool of ecological synthesis, by not only preserving the environment through awareness and care, but also by elevating the citizens who suffer from the consequences of economic expansion and environmental scarcity.

Virtue of Realizing Interdependence:

The world has perceived a significant growth in 'individualism'⁴⁰. The ideas of hyper-consumerism have destroyed the notions of relationships and communities around the world which leads to a permanent state of dissatisfaction in individuals. The individuals, therefore, alone in the crowd keeps on working to fill the void in their lives by buying more commodities⁴¹. A world where no one is connected with each other, to connect themselves with environment becomes extremely difficult. Caught in the vicious circle of the world made by rich anglophone nations, the neoliberalism

impacting majority of world institutions is suffocating the rights of both individuals and the environment. It is further believed that the core of environmental problems in the contemporary world can be perceived as a resultant of humanity's separation from nature⁴².

Does the human separation indicate that there is a lack of interdependence arising because of increasing individualism? The answer is no. When we talk about environmental concerns, the "realization of interdependence" rather than "interdependence" acts as virtue, because the necessity of nature is implicit, but its realization is not. Therefore, the need here is not to build the virtue of interdependence but it is the realization of interdependence that is intensively required.

Another difficulty that is suffered by majority, is getting out of the routine of individualistic lifestyle. This perhaps is the reason that despite of news, reports, movements on environmental degradation and climate change, there is no efforts by individuals towards environment. In the Deloitte Global 2021 Millennial and Gen Z Survey it has been said, the millennials and Gen Z's act individualistically, based on their personal ethics, towards rights, equality and environment, but very little collective actions are perceived in practice⁵.

Ecological solidarity will take the realization of interdependence as a first step towards establishing the society that is harmonious towards each other's actions. Its precepts of interconnectedness and common goal will make this understanding widespread, that people might feel a

difficulty in getting out from the routine of individualism, but still, a push has to be made. Naomi Klein in the similar reference has explained that an extractivist worldview of people, using earth's resources as their own need to be combated through a grand push that brings in all the streams of alike thoughts and forms the ocean where finally wrongs in society can be corrected through an environmental movement⁴³. Her explication not only encourages but forces a call for moral imagination through ecological solidarity.

It is note that, before moving towards this first step of ecological solidarity, we must understand that realization of interdependence with the environment will act as a virtue only when it is understood by individuals and organizations, that environmental resources are not surplus, and that its preservation is a of vital importance. The virtue of realization of interdependence then will be a step ahead towards ecological solidarity, where values of care are imbibed in thoughts and actions. It will also further motivate individuals and state to move towards combating environmental disruption.

Combating the Environmental Disruption: Environmental disruption is caused by the imbalances in ecology because of number of factors affecting. Ecological solidarity can help in combating environmental disruption because of the following reasons:

- As seen in the above discussions, power driven ideologies are the major reason for environmental disruption. Solidarity which is counter of power³⁹, in the realm of ecology, will move towards

sustainable development with a consensus between ecological sciences and human sciences.

- In the final dialectic of Schnaiberg, it is said that ecological synthesis will not prevail social peace because of the disruption it will be causing to treadmill organizations¹⁹. Ecological solidarity moves a step ahead and holds the potential of social peace because of its focus on the thoughts and desire of care towards environment as primary.
- As the lack of realization of interdependence has caused many socio-economic and environmental impacts, these can be removed with the notion of ecological solidarity, where it is believed that there can be no social justice without ecological justice⁴⁴.
- The virtue of solidarity is also held by many who talk about environment because of the unanimity and harmony it holds up. In a recent report, UN chief says “Inclusive and green economies, prosperity, cleaner air and better health are possible for all, if we respond to this crisis with solidarity and courage”⁴⁵.
- Ecological solidarity moreover will not blind side other factors of the society that have been adversely impacted because of environmental disruption. Rather it will act as a potential tool to begin an analysis by taking into consideration the social-economic problems suffered by people around the world. It can thus take into consideration of the formation of poor environmental

refugees, need of food security, starvation of people, climate impacts and actions that must be taken care, and so on.

As a Value? Ecological solidarity can act as a robust principle to make positive transformation towards both environment and lives of people. It can act as a value because of the actions performed through ecological solidarity motivates behaviour that is more conscious of its environment. As standards of behaviour and qualities of being good in the society are essential for harmonious working of the society, ecological solidarity, when taken up as a value by individuals and state can work towards social peace.

Furthermore, since it works towards environmental sustainability, it can act as a value not only to us, but also to future generations. Based on ideology of that individuals comes together for an achievement of a common goal expresses it as value that does not work in raising an individual in the society, rather it makes them more embedded in a community.

Conclusion: It can be said that, when destructions are done through the masses on the masses, then, the restoration has to be done through the masses. To ruin the environment took many years, to restore it will take many. Solidarity in ecology was a natural phenomenon, which got ruined because of the imbalance caused by extensive desire for economic expansion. The greed, often perceived in majority of power structures repeatedly prevailed over ecological concern. The analysis of societal-environmental dialectic potentially unveils majority of economic and political factors causing environmental degradation

and thus, ecological discord. Ecological synthesis brought through environmental solidarity combats ecological disruptions, promotes interdependent ideologies, and promotes individual participation in a community. A walk from being an individual to be a member of a community can bring a lot of hurdles. When structures of power interfere, the struggle becomes even more difficult. But, through right approaches, righteous intentions, and ecological solidarity, the struggles can result with fruits benefiting not one, but many.

Furthermore, it is to note that the conclusion of this paper can be drawn through an idealistic approach where one hope for justice for the environment and expect results that are harmonious. On the other hand, conclusion can be in the form of positioning ourselves in the realization of the problem and after understanding them through this and many alike papers, moving forward in search for newer possibilities of ecological solidarity and participation. Here, in a way forward, I would like to mention and briefly explain both.

A Way Forward: When ecological solidarity is considered for *Justice*, it will act with the notions of conservation of environment, questioning and inquiring the governance and providing services. It will keep not only the environmental issues into consideration, but will expand its area and will work through solidarity for the justice for poor, deprived and disadvantaged.

When ecological solidarity is considered as a *vision for future*, it will work as a value. It will focus on the virtue of coming

together for the achievement of a common goal. It will encourage the future environmental enthusiasts to take up the task of environmental solidarity and work for common good.

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