



NABA BALLYGUNGE MAHAVIDYALAYA

(Formerly CHARUCHANDRA EVENING COLLEGE)

27E, Bosepukur Road, Kolkata - 700042

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Topic of the Seminar: Environmental and Moral Awareness

Organizer: Department of Philosophy, Naba Ballygunge Mahavidyalaya

Resource Person: Dr Mousumi Bhattacharya, Associate Professor, Department of Philosophy, Scottish Church College

Seminar type: Departmental

Date: 19/09/2023

Links to the seminar on Institutional Youtube channel:

1. To the speaker's lecture

<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/#inbox/FMfcgzQZSjhjtQDJDbNLGCRPJxHNZbzI?projector=1>

2. To the interactive session:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EnoqWfuCy1U>



Dr. Mousumi Bhattacharya, Associate Professor, Department of Philosophy, Scottish Church College addresses the audience in Departmental Seminar on 19.09.2023

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The seminar began with the Head of the Department Smt Mala Saha delivering her welcome address, introducing the resource person Dr Mousumi Bhattacharyya, Associate Professor of Department of Philosophy, Scottish Church College, Kolkata and giving a very brief introduction to the topic of the seminar "Environmental and Moral Awareness" She said that there are two approaches to environment: anthropocentric and non-anthropocentric. Anthropocentric approach is normalised and glorified. Even in the Bible, it is mentioned that human is in the centre of creation, that Almighty has created man in the image of Himself and this validates that humankind occupies the centre of the universe and therefore has the sole authority and right to everything on earth. She added that as much as humans have intrinsic value, so do the non-human species and a cursory knowledge of Ecocritical approach would point out at the fact that non-human species have equal rights to survival and sustenance as their human counterparts, and therefore it is the fundamental duties of humans to ensure a respectful and valued survival of their nonhuman counterparts to uphold ecological balance.



Smt Mala Saha, Associate professor and Head, Department of Philosophy, Naba Ballygunge Mahavidyalaya, delivers her opening address in the seminar titled Environmental and Moral Awareness on 19.09.2024


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The Principal, Naba Ballygunge Mahavidyalaya, Dr Ayantika Ghosh, delivered the welcome address and said a few lines on the topic of the seminar. She focused upon values and ethics as integral part of moral awareness, saying that a child's morality and sense of principles and ethics are built in the family. It is the family members that instill ethics and contribute to the moral development of the child, making a home out of a house. She ended her very brief but insightful address saying that the speaker would talk elaborately on the necessity of ethic-building in every institution-- formal or informal.



Dr Ayantika Ghosh, Principal, Naba Ballygunge Mahavidyalaya addresses the audience on the need of moral awareness and practical ethics, in the Departmental seminar of Philosophy on 19.09.2023

Dr Mousumi Bhattacharyya began her inciting. Lecture focusing on the fact that owing to Boom in social media, the world has become smaller and accessible to each one of us in the drawing-room or even within an hour feasts in that device called mobile phone. She added that environment is not only limited to our immediate socio- cultural surrounding we inhabit, but also each and every corner of the world. We get to know the minor and major incidents that happen everywhere in the world, by watching television or surfing the internet, which provides us with a wide array of information from China to Latin America to the remotest corners of Africa or Australia. This concomitantly helps us in forming awareness about environment qualitatively as well as quantitatively. She said that in the ethical discourse of the present era we we use the term environment very frequently and, we must keep in mind that environment is not to be equated with nature. She made it clear that environment is a surrounding in which humans in particular and organisms in general live and grow which is physical as well as socio-cultural. Stating the subtle difference between environment and ecology, mentioning that ecology is a term first used by Earnst Haeckel, She said that ecology is the comprehensive summative relationship between environment and an organism.

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Significantly, she mentioned that human and nonhuman world actually rely upon the food supplied. Very significantly Dr. Bhattacharyya explained what ecological balance is; humans can live in harmony with animals, plants and other organisms without disturbing them, which is called a balanced ecosystem. Mentioning environmental ethics she said that it is the studies of moral relationship between humans and nonhumans. Sadly, traditional wisdom says that environment is human-centred or anthropocentric. Since the seminar was targeted to make the UG students of the Department of Philosophy understand the reduce idiosyncrasies of environmental ethics and philosophy, the speaker explained it easily in a student centric approach referring to the fact that ecology exists everywhere even the sediments underneath the bed of a pond is also a part of ecology , and it also requires food supply, the plants and the animal bodies mix with the sediments, and this suggests the ecological balance, the interactions or interconnections between different organisms.



Dr. Mousumi Bhattacharya, Associate Professor,
Department of Philosophy, Scottish Church College
addresses the audience in Departmental Seminar on
19.09.2023

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She referred to the fact that as long as ecological balance is ensured, there is an ideal condition and we head towards destruction the moment this ecological balance is devastated. The lecture was an insightful critique of Western Philosophy in general, stating that philosophers like Leibniz, Descartes and Kant had all viewed that environment is human-centred and human beings consider themselves to have the sole right to use the universe and all its contents for their own benefit. According to Dr Bhattacharya, recent environmental activists move away from this traditional philosophy and express their views, saying that it is our duty to protect the environment, including the non-human species, from destruction. With the help of power point presentation, the speaker explained the differences between anthropocentric and non-anthropocentric ethics. She clearly pointed out that An ethical system could be non-anthropocentric in a number of ways. Any account of morality that has the effect of removing humans from being the sole thing of concern is non-anthropocentric. The main examples in environmental ethics are: animal rights/liberation theories (sentient animals have moral standing); biocentric theories (individual living things have moral standing); ecocentric theories (ecological systems have moral standing). Thus, rightly, as the speaker said, it is morally wrong to pollute the environment or deprive non-human species of their rights to live in this planet. It was for the benefit of the student- listeners that Dr Bhattacharya explained intrinsic and instrumental value or extrinsic value as part of environmental ethics. The concept of intrinsic value reflects the perspective that nature has value in its own right, independent of human uses. Intrinsic value opens us to the possibility that nature has value even if it does not directly or indirectly benefit humans. Intrinsic value is viewed from an ecocentric standpoint. The UG students for whom philosophy was a new subject were taught in a very student-friendly bilingual approach by Dr Bhattacharya, who explained in the easiest possible way, saying that intrinsic value is anybody's value to oneself, whereas extrinsic value is the value in which one is being used by somebody for their desired end. Citing the example of a tree, she said that a tree has its own intrinsic value, its life is its own intrinsic value, but when we take its fruits and flowers to gratify our own desire or when we cut a tree to suit our needs, it is the usage of its extrinsic value. Extrinsic value is thus the mean to someone's end. Although it was a delivered lecture but the lecture was interactive as well. A student responded that humans have responsibility towards environment, because after all, the trees keep us alive with a supply of oxygen and therefore, it is our duty to ensure the protection of trees. She mentioned that the apathy of the traditional philosophers towards our responsibility for wellbeing of non-human species and the modern environmental activists' movement against this homogeneous anthroponormative approach makes the study of environmental ethics problematised. This contemplative and insightful lecture was aligned with a purpose to engender environmental harmony and inclusiveness.


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Dr Bhattacharya stated that non anthropocentric philosophy is inclusion of each and every species that comprises the environment from rainforest to pond to algae to insects and amoeba and every flora and fauna. As the speaker emphasized, biocentric ethics is an ethical perspective that all living things deserve equal moral consideration. It places a moral obligation on humans to act in ways that preserve biodiversity, protect the environment, and respect animal rights. She made specific mention of Peter Singer and Tom Regan, the ecological balance pioneers and environmental philosophers.



The audience listens to the speaker in rapt attention, Departmental Seminar Environmental and Moral Awareness on 19.09.2023



A slide from Dr Bhattacharya's presentation on Biocentric ethics propounded by Peter Singer and Tom Regan

With reference to Deep and Shallow Ecologisms, Dr Bhattacharya argued that Deep ecologism believes that humans should radically change their relationship with nature. Its proponents reject shallow ecologism for prioritizing humans above other forms of life, and subsequently preserving the environmentally destructive way of life in modern societies. It aspires to sustain nature by making large-scale changes to our lifestyle. These may include limiting the commercial farming of meat to preserve forest areas and reduce the artificial fattening of animals, the reshaping of transport systems which involve the use of internal combustion engines. Besides advocating these lifestyle changes, deep ecologism shifts the attention from pollution and conservation narratives to robust policy formulation and implementation. Shallow ecology refers to the philosophical or political position that environmental preservation should only be practiced to the extent that it meets human interests. It is more like a powerful and fashionable fight against pollution and resource depletion rather than a radical change. Exponents of this philosophy believe in continuing our present lifestyle, but with specific tweaks aimed at minimising the damage to the environment.

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She ended her lecture referring to moral obligations of all of us to help in ecological sustenance, saying that disruption of the creation of God, including flora and fauna, is violation of moral norms and acting contrary to God's will and this finds reflection in Biblical theology, especially in the Book of Genesis. This is the Theological Point of view, one's responsibility is not tampering with God's creation. Referring to Australian environmental philosopher John Passmore, Dr Bhattacharya said Passmore's unequivocal anthropocentrism made him a reference point in the discourse of environmental ethics and many treatises in field begin with (or include) a refutation of his views. Passmore's skepticism about attempts to attribute intrinsic value to nature, and his preferred position of valuing nature in terms of what it contributes to the flourishing of sentient creatures (including humans), is perhaps not as unfashionable now as it was 20 years ago. Passmore was as much a historian of ideas as a philosopher and his scholarship always paid careful attention to the complex historical context of philosophical problems.



Two slides from Dr Bhattacharya's talk in the seminar on 19/09/2023

The seminar rounded off with an invigorating interactive session in which queries on anthropocentrism, anthropocene, posthumanism and speciesism were raised and answered.



A snippet from the interactive session

Outcomes of the seminar:

- ✓ Formation of Responsibility towards maintaining ecological balance
- ✓ Understanding the philosophical thoughts of environmental philosophers
- ✓ Having a knowledge of anthropocentric and non anthropocentric
- ✓ Clear concepts of biocentric and ecocentric approaches

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