



An Eco-conscious Study of Rohan Chakravarty's *Green Humour for a Greying Planet and Pugmarks and Carbon Footprints*

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ABSTRACT

We are surrounded by a world that is continually and literally on fire. The Earth's temperature is expected to rise by at least 1.5 degrees Celsius between 2021 and 2040, according to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). It also indicates that sea levels are rising faster than anticipated. In the absence of drastic and immediate action, our trajectory toward an ominous future is predetermined. As long as greenhouse gases continue to be released into the atmosphere, the consequences of global warming caused by humans are imminent, irreversible for the current generation, and will continue to deteriorate the planet further. Depletion of natural resources and effects on other species characterize the Anthropocene, the present geological epoch, brought about by human activity on a global scale. Humans now view non-humans as separate from themselves, which has weakened the ideas of 'symbiosis' and 'coexistence.' The present paper endeavours to analyze the relevance and effectivity of Rohan Chakravarty's eco-comics - *Green Humour for a Greying Planet and Pugmarks and Carbon Footprint* in an attempt to explore the relationship between humans and non-humans with the goal of achieving ecological equilibrium. It seeks to analyze the ecological argument of a world model in which people and animals have interchangeable functions by drawing on anthropomorphism and anthrozoology studies.

The study focuses on demonstrating how animals have assimilated human culture to address environmental issues. Rohan Chakravarty gives the human-wildlife conflict a visual and edutaining twist in his works. These literary works skillfully explore complex topics such as wildlife conservation, climate change, and environmental governance, thereby contributing to the environmental comics genre, which is colloquially referred to as "eco-comics." By skillfully combining satirical wit with incisive critiques of anthropocentric social norms, Chakravarty's works distinguish themselves by shedding light on harmful ecological shifts. In doing so, they facilitate the implementation of more substantial measures to tackle these pressing issues. A relatively recent field within ecocritical studies is known as "Deep Ecology." With the intention of fostering ecological awareness and cultivating a sense of kinship between humanity and the biosphere, the term was originally proposed by the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess. According to Deep Ecology, the human being is merely one of many species in nature and not the preeminent one; the notion that humanity is exceptional is hastening the depletion of the environment caused by human activities. The ecocomics being examined herein integrate significant characteristics of the Deep Ecology concept. As a result, the current study conducts an ecological analysis of these comics, examining the author's endeavors to foster eco-consciousness among the audience.

Keywords: Deep Ecology, Ecocomics, Green Humour, Anthropocentrism, Anthropomorphism

Introduction

Ecocritical Theory, an academic field that examines the correlation between literature and the natural environment, is currently garnering the interest of a growing cohort of scholars. Ecocriticism, an interdisciplinary field initially defined by Cheryll Glotfelty, analyses the literary and poetic creations of poets and novelists through the lens of nature and environmental concerns. According to this theory, literature is significantly influenced by nature, since it provides a substantial amount of the setting in which language can generate fantastical representations. Therefore, it is possible and advisable to examine the literary piece through this theoretical lens as well. Environmental literary criticism, also referred to as Green Studies or Ecopoetics, is an expansive concept that is gaining traction among critics. One of its primary goals is to raise awareness regarding the irreplaceable significance that a healthy biosphere will hold for the future of humanity. Ecocritical studies encompass a multitude of subdisciplines and strands, including but not limited to Ecofeminism, Ecocide, and Deep Ecology. Ecofeminism, a term introduced in 1974 by the French feminist Francoise d'Eaunne, examines the relationship between nature and women through an analysis of the ways in which patriarchal dominance impacts each. In 1950, Arthur Galston coined the term "ecocide" to denote the anthropogenic devastation of the natural environment. Ecocide is caused by nuclear war, the improper disposal of hazardous substances, and the overexploitation of natural resources. The term "Deep Ecology" was originally introduced by the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess in his article "The Shallow and the Deep, Long-range Ecology Movement: A Summary." It takes a spiritual, philosophical, and ecological stance and views the Earth, animals, plant life, and humans as an organic unit.

Deep ecology is founded upon the notion that in lieu of an anthropocentric perspective, the environmental movement ought to adopt a biocentric one. Anthropocentrism posits that human beings occupy a central position in nature, surpassing all other living entities in significance. All other natural entities, including minerals, vegetation, and animals, are regarded as resources that are available for human exploitation. Man is frequently portrayed in religious texts as the supreme creation of God, a Supreme Being whose purpose in creating humanity is to exploit him. Conversely, biocentrism ardently asserts that the value of every element in Creation is equivalent. Rather than fixating excessively on the human being and his perpetual desires, it accords equivalent significance to all surrounding natural objects and other living organisms. It challenges the anthropocentric perspective that argues for the preservation of the environment solely for its exploitable value, rather than for its intrinsic worth.

Artists now have begun to depict the human indifference towards nature in light of the ongoing environmental degradation, pollution, and global warming, which have emerged as critical threats to our very existence. Environmental comics, which examine crucial environmental concepts, issues, and information, are an engrossing subgenre of comics, cartoons, and graphic novels. An example of a scholarly work that records the scientific facets of climate change is Philippe Squarzoni's renowned work *Climate Changed: A Personal Journey through the Science*. Similarly, Rachel Hope Allison's *I'm Not a Plastic Bag* cleverly personifies the infamous Great Pacific Garbage Patch. Based on an immersive experience within the domain of these dynamic masterpieces, where the atmosphere becomes increasingly animated as one turns the pages, it invites all to embrace the harmonious fusion of knowledge and entertainment. *Green Humour for a Greying Planet*, the first internationally syndicated ecocomic from India, adeptly integrates visual and verbal components while scathingly scrutinizing human-induced endeavours through the implementation of humour. In a world that is becoming more and more plagued by such problems, ecocomics are assuming a prominent role in elucidating the complexities of ecological issues and concepts in an effort to educate a broader audience and motivate them to take action in response to the escalating number of environmental crises. This paper evaluates the effectiveness of ecocomics by Rohan Chakravarty as an ecocritical work that not only confronts the brutal reality of environmental degradation but also intimately connects readers with wildlife, the environment, and its conservation.

Popular for ridiculing the plethora of ingenious methods man has devised to destroy the planet we call home, Rohan Chakravarty, who was once a dentist turned cartoonist, has amassed a considerable following. Both *Green Humour for a Greying Planet* (2021) and *Pugmarks and Carbon Footprints* (2023), compilations of comic strips centered around wildlife and environment, are derivative works of his Green Humour series. Depicted through the use of vivid hues that capture the diversity of the planet's ecosystem, it features free-hand cartoon illustrations that appeal to both scientifically minded and general readers. The books are a collection of comic strips that were previously published on many platforms over the past ten years. The strips include topics like human-animal relationships, ecological imbalance, and the effects of COVID-19, portrayed through animal characters. The focus is mostly on challenges to animal habitats and environmental degradation caused by negative human actions. Chakravarty states in his introduction:

I have grown to realize that cartoons on conservation work in three ways: deliver the message of conservation without making it preachy, eliminate jargon and make the information being presented easy to retain and respond to, and instil a curiosity and respect for the natural world in the mind of the reader. (*Green Humour* 12)

The book consistently incorporates irony to communicate a clear message advocating for the long-term coexistence of humans and non-humans. The book contains chapters on terminology related to Linnaean animal taxonomy, featuring anthropomorphized animal characters as representatives of their distinct roles in the ecosystem. The animals mentioned are either adapting to human culture or are close to doing so due to the ongoing threat to their habitat and survival. The mute non-humans have acquired a human-like voice, displaying characteristics of deculturation and acculturation. These creatures exhibit characteristics of both wildlife protection and sustainability governance at the same time. It is crucial to conduct an analysis of the global impacts of the coronavirus pandemic in order to fully grasp the dangers associated with wildlife trafficking and the subsequent damage to the environment. While some strips criticize manmade damage, others also show enormous respect for humans. The animal characters see nature conservationists, field biologists, herpetologists, ornithologists, etc., as saviours of their species.

Deep ecology is an environmental philosophy introduced in 1984 by Arne Naess and George Sessions, aiming to consolidate environmental ideas through eight fundamental principles. The compilation of thoughts and ideas regarding the environment has taken from several religions and ideologies, exerting significant effect on many individuals over time. Arne Naess recognized Rachel Carson's 1962 book *Silent Spring* as a significant influence on his concept of deep ecology. Naess integrated his ecological perspective with Gandhian nonviolence and engaged in direct actions in different environmental movements on multiple occasions (Naess, 1986). George Sessions and Arne Naess expressed deep ecology concepts in a straightforward and unbiased manner, aiming for comprehension and acceptance by individuals with diverse philosophical and religious beliefs. Deep ecology has faced numerous criticisms from both ecologists and non-ecologists since its inception (Devall & Sessions, 1985). At the same time, it is popular among a diverse range of environmental activists and scholars. Individuals from many backgrounds who have shared concerns for the Earth support the ideals of deep ecology. Advocates of the platform principles have diverse religious, philosophical, and political backgrounds. They are united by a far-reaching vision of what is needed to safeguard the natural communities and values of the Earth (Drengson, Devall & Schroll, 2011).

Christianity emphasizes the importance of the natural environment as God's creation and the responsibility of humans as stewards, while also recognizing humanity's vital position in the divine story of the Earth. The "stewardship view" suggests that humans have a responsibility, assigned by God, to care for the natural world. However, it also implies that humans are distinct from and hold a higher status than the natural world (Attfield, 1983). The "deep ecological" perspective suggests that people are a product of the natural environment and our destiny is intertwined with its destiny. Deep ecologists think that the creator God selected a 15 billion-year evolutionary process as the means for life and consciousness to thrive in the universe. The stewardship perspective conflicts with the deep ecology perspective, which posits that nature possesses inherent value regardless of human demands or existence (Cheney, 1987). Authors have drawn parallels between deep ecology and various other disciplines (Dwivedi, 2001). The eight fundamental principles of deep ecology, as outlined by Arne Naess in 1986, are as follows:

1. The well-being and flourishing of human and non-human life on Earth have value in themselves (intrinsic value, inherent worth). These values are independent of the usefulness of the non-human world for human purposes.
2. Richness and diversity of life forms contribute to the realization of these values and are also values in themselves.
3. Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy vital needs
4. The flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantial decrease of the human population. The flourishing of nonhuman life requires such a decrease
5. Present human interference with the nonhuman world is excessive, and the situation is rapidly worsening.
6. Policies must therefore be changed. These policies affect basic economic, technological, and ideological structures. The resulting state of affairs will be deeply different from the present.
7. The ideological change is mainly that of appreciating life quality rather than adhering to an increasingly higher standard of living. There will be an awareness of the difference between big and great.
8. Those who subscribe to the foregoing points have an obligation directly or indirectly to try to implement the necessary changes. (Naess 86)

The very concept of deep ecology is defined by these eight fundamental principles, which state that it is the philosophical study of nature and living things, particularly in regard to human and nonhuman values, ethics, and religion. It is more prudent to value a high quality of life than an elevated standard of living. It is at this juncture that one must recognize the distinction between greatness and bigness. We ought to be modest in our methods yet ambitious in our aims. To fully grasp this formulation, one must possess knowledge regarding the distinction between shallow and profound ecology.

The primary focus of shallow ecology pertains to the anthropocentric way of life. It holds that the purpose of nature is to protect and benefit humanity. Nature is designed to satisfy the requirements of humans. It is comparable to culture's predominance over non-culture. It considers the human being to be an autonomous, solitary entity in charge of nature. The terms conservation and preservation may be more suitable for elucidating the distinctions between shallow and profound ecology. Conservation entails the systematic preservation of all natural resources, including oil, water, and forests, so that they may continue to serve future generations. Consequently, shallow ecology and conservation can be equated, while preservation bears a striking resemblance to deep ecology. It pertains more to the aspect of ensuring safety. It here refers to the preservation of nature from being used by humans. With the belief that nature has the right to remain untainted and undisturbed by human intervention and destruction, preserve nature in its natural state. The examination of these ecocomics will aid in the comprehension of ecological awareness and facets of deep ecology, while also revealing the distinctions between shallow and deep ecology.

The comic's anthropomorphizing of animals and the environment by Rohan Chakravarty provides clarity on the distinction between shallow and profound ecology. Anthropomorphism is defined as the portrayal of deities, nature, or non-human animals in such a way that they possess human characteristics, thoughts, or intentions. The animals in these comics vocalize their displeasure and irritation at the vandalism of their habitats, while also holding political leaders, organizations, and the general public accountable. Chakravarty endeavours to provide them with the resources necessary to assert themselves. We are compelled to recognize our pitiful and self-centered stance towards the environment and nature once the animals begin to offer sardonic commentary and sharp, caustic humour in their criticism. The comic effectively poses the question: Would we demolish the dwellings of our fellow humans with the same callous disregard that we kill ecosystems teeming with diverse organisms? Therefore, anthropomorphism can be seen as a strategic essentialist instrument that grants a platform for defenseless and vulnerable wildlife to express their discontent with the ongoing human-caused tragedies that befall them and their delicate habitats.

Given its comedic nature, Chakravarty's work possesses a distinctive ability to enlighten and sensitize readers about wildlife and their natural habitats without succumbing to monotony. The creatures depicted in the comic are not ordinary characters. They exhibit a perceptive and insightful disposition, consistently disclosing the detrimental consequences that arise from human indifference, including the threat to their very existence and habitat. Anthropomorphism somewhat aligns with Derrida's examination of the ontology of animals in *The Animal that therefore I am* (2008) which centers on the impact of animals on human existence and perception. It helps interpret the animal emotions depicted in the comic strips included in Chakravarty's book based on this approach.



Figure 1: As habitat of tigers across country shrink, they have nowhere to be. (Green Humour 18)

The comic strip above consisting of five panels depicts a striped tiger in yellow and black assuming five distinct poses at various locations within a national park. As the tiger traverses the park, rectangular widgets containing the signboards "NH-7", "NH-35", and "NH-11" are positioned in the initial three panels. The tiger exhibits security concerns regarding his habitat in the second two panels by facing forward with large, concerned eyes, whereas in the first two panels, it is depicted facing backward with pointed ears. The tiger can be seen in the fourth panel peering through a bush in order to evade the oncoming vehicles' gaze; an additional "NH-93" signboard hangs above his head. In the fifth panel, he ascends to a greater altitude in the park and remarks on the multitude of moving vehicles on the highways, "More highways through the national park than stripes on my body!" (Green Humour 18). The fact that this tiger can comment on his immediate surroundings and think, in contrast to actual animals, undermines the Cartesian notion that only humans are capable of thought. Tiger, in its capacity as a non-human animal, symbolizes the capacity for reason, expresses the aggression that is mirrored back at it, and tenaciously opposes human encroachment upon its natural habitat. Chakravarty's use of anthropomorphism in the comic further raises readers' awareness regarding the harm inflicted upon wildlife and their delicate habitats under the guise of development, as illustrated in the figure below.



Figure 2: Constant noise pollution, caused by a variety of human industrial activities, is being resisted by dolphins. (Pugmarks 168)

The illustration above serves as a prime example of how dolphins react and respond to the profiteering and indifference of industrial marine activities. The persistent noise pollution is distressing and detrimental to dolphins and other animals that depend on sonar for survival functions such as feeding, communication, and navigation. Moreover, it poses a grave threat to their very existence. Chakravarty conducts a witty and eloquent analogy between the ominous sounds of the marine industry and metal music. The dolphin is both astonished and irritated by the humans' complete disregard for their safety and comfort. Immediately, the impact of noise pollution resulting from industrial activities in the marine environment on marine life and its habitat is brought to the attention of the readers. Simultaneously, the witty comparison between the propeller and drilling sounds and heavy metal music amuses them.

The shallowness is not limited to exploiting wildlife as a resource. Developed nations continue to place the onus on developing countries and have not met their responsibilities in addressing climate change, despite having the highest per capita greenhouse gas emissions in the world and transferring polluting companies to less developed regions. They hold the belief that technological progress is conducive to economic prosperity. They seem to promote technology in good faith, but the fact remains that they are generating a smoldering cloud that endangers human life. The shallow approach fails to identify the source of pollution and makes no effort to resolve the issue; instead, it takes a fruitless, expeditiously implemented shortcut. Chakravarty takes a dig at "Climate Change Deniers of the World" (*Green Humour* 31) and so-called Pseudo-conservationists.



Figure 3: Former US President criticized for calling Climate Change a hoax. (*Green Humour* 196)

The illustration above depicts one of the deniers being mocked at. The stance of former United States President Donald Trump regarding climate change has been subject to perpetual criticism. Despite being the leading emitter of greenhouse gases, the United States has had its President consistently undermine the

persistent endeavours of climate change researchers in this regard. The cartoon depicts the outright rejection of the phenomenon of global warming “because Climate Change is a Big Fat Hoax..” (*Green Humour* 196). Further, the panel demonstrates how a polar bear hurls a big fat ice ball on Trump for his deceit and indifference towards the plight of these endangered species. The misery endured by these creatures is incomprehensible. Rob Nixon astutely observes the following with regard to this phenomenon in his book *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*:

Politicians routinely adopt a “last in, first out” stance toward environmental issues, admitting them when times are flush, dumping them as soon as times get tight. Because preventive or remedial environmental legislation typically targets slow violence, it cannot deliver dependable electoral cycle results, even though those results may ultimately be life saving. ... Many politicians-- and indeed many voters-- routinely treat environmental action as critical yet not urgent. ... How can leaders be goaded to avert catastrophe when the political rewards of their actions will not accrue to them but will be reaped on someone else’s watch decades, even centuries from now? How can environmental activists and storytellers work to counter the potent political corporate, and even scientific forces invested in immediate self-interest. (Nixon 9)

Government indifference towards wildlife exploitation and climate change is emphasized in a number of accurate illustrations that appear throughout the comic. They unveil and enforce accountability on those in positions of authority. Some of the illustrations are provided below.



Figure 4: After delivering a speech at COP 26, U.S. President Joe Biden simultaneously signs the lease for oil drilling in the Gulf of Mexico (Pugmarks 96)

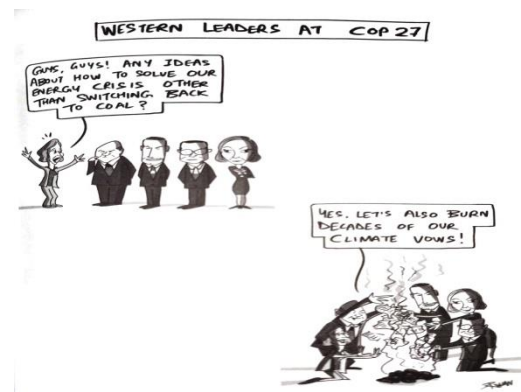


Figure 5: Western leaders are being criticized at COP 27 (Pugmarks 197)

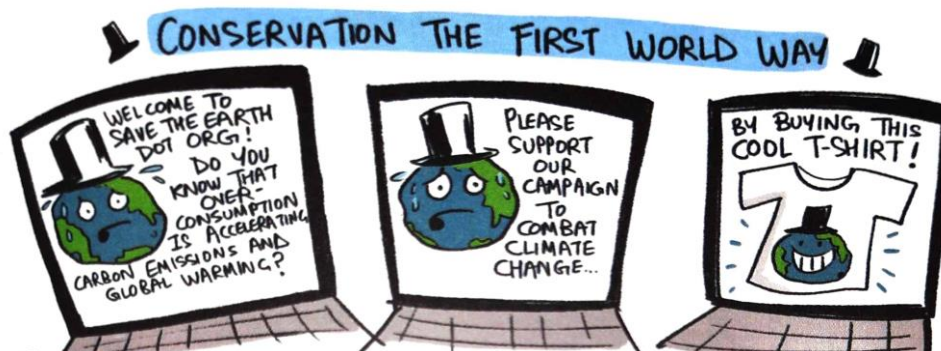


Figure 6: Online organizations claiming to conserve the planet by buying their merchandise like t-shirts in the guise of supporting their cause (*Green Humour* 197)

Every single one of the aforementioned images boldly emphasize and mordantly comments on the intentional disregard and apathy towards the environment demonstrated by influential governments and organisations. In addition to unveiling the environmental ignorance and disregard frequently demonstrated by wealthy people and those in positions of authority, Chakravarty's comics underscore the stark and profound discrepancies that exist between the impoverished and the affluent in terms of the consequences of climate change. Although the effects of global warming are undeniable, they are more likely to affect the poor in comparison to the wealthy and powerful, who are responsible for the majority of the harm. The following

data illustrates the egregious contrast and discrepancy between the present consequences of climate change for the impoverished and those who are more fortunate.

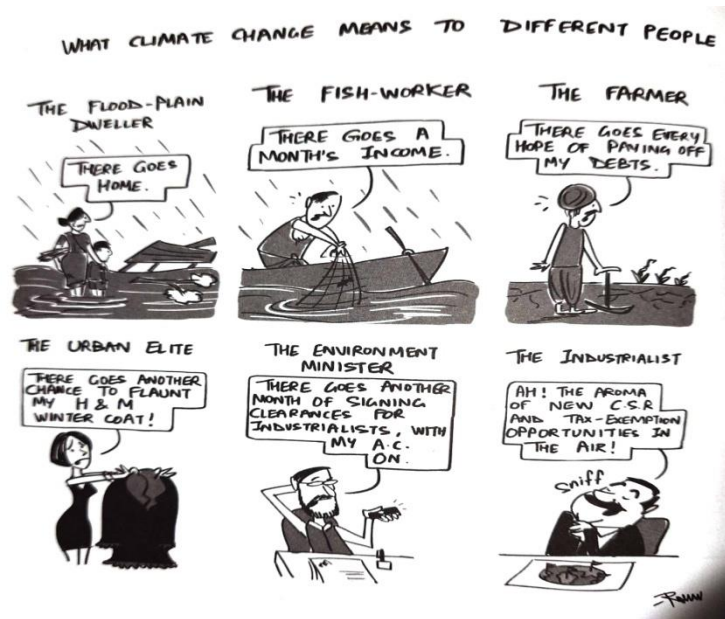


Figure 7: Impact of Climate Change as experienced by different sections. (Pugmarks 26)

By situating these comics within an Indian context, the picture below brings attention to a significant matter that is frequently disregarded and overlooked. On average, a three-day wedding produces between 700 and 800 kilograms of wet waste and 1,500 kilograms of dry waste. The biggest villains, according to experts, are the estimated 10 million weddings that take place in India annually, which considerably contribute to the nation's annual food waste. The NGO Feeding India estimates that between 10 and 20 percent of the food served at nuptials is discarded. In contrast to the socialist ethos that once characterized India, conspicuous consumption is currently not stigmatized. This is a new India imbued with aspiration and new value systems, in which excess is the ultimate success.



Figure 8: Tonnes of waste generation at Big, Fat Indian weddings (Green Humour 25)

The objective of the comics is to reconstruct and reacquaint readers with the profound interdependence and connection that exists between humans and the animal kingdom. Never does the book become tiresome, monotonous, or irrelevant. Conversely, the reader is acquainted with an assortment of problems posed in a manner that is profoundly personally resonant and emblematic of popular culture. The text fervently and sarcastically insists that, in the pursuit of progress, the stewardship mentality be abandoned and in its place, a social alliance that is long-lasting, mutually advantageous, and resistant to fleeting divisions be established. Human and nonhuman world boundaries must be eliminated. Universal salvation can only be achieved through self-realization. In actuality, the realization of the ecological self is contingent upon the realization of the self. For our survival in this biosphere, self-realization is both an essential requirement and an inherent human privilege. Beginning with our ego gratification, which is the most inevitable aspect of our lives, is essential if we wish to develop and broaden ourselves.



Figure 9: Women contributing their lives to conservation being applauded. (*Green Humour* 176)

The comics cover nearly every aspect of human cruelty that stands in stark contrast to the principles of Deep Ecology. Nevertheless, comics didn't fail to acknowledge individuals who are deserving of praise, namely those who are dedicated to the cause of conservation. The picture below demonstrates "some wild women of India" who have devoted their lives to this noble cause. It also mentions that if allowed and given the opportunity, "Matriarchy might just save the world some day." (*Green Humour* 176)

Conclusion

Economics, a literary and artistic endeavor pioneered by Rohan Chakravarty, have demonstrated their capacity to educate the public about the planet while revealing the horrifying and severe realities of expeditious environmental and wildlife degradation. Through the presentation of a critique that stems from a limited understanding of the self, these comics aim to cultivate an ecological consciousness within their audience. They foster an understanding of the grave dangers that persistent development and encroachment pose. Furthermore, it implies that in the absence of urban avarice, individuals might be able to live contentedly, since good nature is capable of providing for their most fundamental requirements. However, for this new conception of human existence to be considered legitimate, non-human entities must be accorded the same rights and regard that humans have traditionally reserved for themselves. It is imperative that all individuals embrace the principles of deep ecology. By doing so, they will not only eradicate environmental issues but also social, political, economic, and human relationship issues, thereby improving the quality of life on Earth. To stop the global extinction crisis and attain genuine ecological sustainability,

our society's values will need to be reevaluated. Therefore, it is advantageous to learn how to coexist harmoniously with our environment. People will gain an awareness of their interdependence with the natural world, become imaginative and engaged members of society, and participate intellectually and personally in the formation of our shared future through sustainability education.

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